

J.G. Fichte and the Atheism Dispute (1798–1800)

Edited by
Yolanda Estes and Curtis Bowman

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Abbreviations

- AA *Kants gesammelte Schriften*. (ed.) Königliche Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Berlin: Reimer/de Gruyter, 1900–.
- ACR *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation*. (ed. and trans.) Garrett Green. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978.
- ASL *J. G. Fichte: Die Anweisung zum seligen Leben, oder auch die Religionslehre, 1806*. (ed.) F. Medicus. Hamburg: Meiner, 1910.
- EPW *J. G. Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings, 1794–1799*. (ed. and trans.) Daniel Breazeale. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1988.
- FG *Fichte im Gespräch*. (ed.) Erich Fuchs, Reinhard Lauth, and Walter Schieche. Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt: Frommann–Holzboog, 1991. (Citations include volume, page number, and if applicable, item number.)
- FNR *J. G. Fichte: Foundations of Natural Right, 1796–97*. (ed.) Frederick Neuhouser, (trans.) Michael Baur. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- FSCP *Fichte: The Self and the Calling of Philosophy, 1762–1799*. Anthony J. La Vopa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- GA *J. G. Fichte Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*. (ed.) Reinhard Lauth, Hans Jacob, and Hans Gliwitsky. Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann, 1964–. (Citations include part, volume, page number, and if applicable, item number.)
- IWL *J. G. Fichte: Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings, 1797–1800*. (ed. and trans.) Daniel Breazeale. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 1994.
- MPW *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi: The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*. (ed. and trans.) George di Giovanni. Montreal/London: McGill–Queen’s University Press, 1994.
- QA *La Querelle de L’athéisme*. (ed. and trans.) Jean-Christophe Goddard. Paris: J. Vrin, 1993.
- SE *J. G. Fichte: The System of Ethics According to the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre, 1798*. (ed. and trans.) Daniel Breazeale and Günter Zöller. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- SFA *Die Schriften zu J. G. Fichte’s Atheismus-Streit, 1798–1800*. (ed.) Hans Lindau. Munich: Georg Müller, 1913.
- SW *Johann Gottlieb Fichtes sämtliche Werke*. (ed.) I. H. Fichte. Berlin: Veit, 1845–46.
- VM *J. G. Fichte: The Vocation of Man, 1800*. (ed. and trans.) Peter Preuss. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987.

- WLN M J. G. Fichte: *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy (Wissenschaftslehre) nova methodo*, 1796/99. (ed. and trans.) Daniel Breazeale. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1992.
- WLN M [K] J. G. Fichte: *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, *Kollegnachschrift Chr. Fr. Krause*, 1798/99 [“Krause Nachschrift”]. Hamburg: Meiner, 1982.
- WLN M [H] J. G. Fichte: *Wissenschaftslehre nach den Vorlesungen von Hr. Pr. Fichte*, 1796/97 [“Halle Nachschrift”]. In GA, IV, 2, pp. 1–267.

Commentator’s Note: In this volume, when an English translation of a German work is cited, information for the corresponding German edition of the work is supplied in parentheses. For example: VM (GA, I, 6, pp. 189–309) and J. G. Fichte: “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance” (GA, I, 5, pp. 347–57).

All translator–editor’s interpolations are enclosed by square brackets, i.e. [], and all commentator–editor’s interpolations are enclosed by scroll brackets, i.e. {}. Fichte’s own notes, which appear as endnotes to the relevant chapters, are marked with asterisks, i.e. *, whereas editors’ notes are marked by superscripted numbers. All biblical references are to the King James Version (Authorized Version) of the Bible.

The editors have retained within the texts of the translations the original page numbers used by the various participants in the atheism dispute, but in the footnotes they have also included the corresponding page numbers, if any, of this book as well as the page numbers of the relevant modern German editions.

Translator's Preface

In 1997 I suggested to Yolanda Estes that she and I collaborate on a volume of translations and commentary devoted to Fichte and the atheism controversy. We quickly got under way, drafting the requisite proposal and beginning the search for an interested publisher. Unfortunately, however, several years passed before we could truly focus on the project. Besides the usual roadblocks that academic life throws in the way of well-meaning scholars, our personal lives contributed more than their usual share of obstacles. I was able to concentrate on my scholarly work only after I left academia and became an independent scholar in 2003. At that time, however, I had other projects to finish first. Once they were out of the way, I was able to focus on the task of translating. Yolanda and I then made steady, though occasionally leisurely, progress on this book. As a result, most of the work was done during the past four years.

The chief reason for the slow pace of this project has been the difficulty of the German texts that we decided to include in this collection. Given that the atheism controversy involved numerous participants, there is no single prose style that cuts across all of the works that I have translated. Furthermore, much of the original German can all too frequently strike readers of modern German as not only confusing but also as positively ungrammatical. Sometimes, unfortunately, it can even border on the unintelligible. All that a translator can do in such a situation is to do his best to produce translations that modern readers, who may or may not have a background in the various debates that were taken up in the atheism controversy, will not find completely bewildering at first glance, so that in time they can come to a greater appreciation of these works after what may prove to be a difficult first reading.

With such a goal in mind, I have broken up most of the long sentences found in the original German texts. (There have been times, though, when the exigencies of the German language have prevented me from doing this.) I admit that I did this somewhat reluctantly, since it seems to me that the long periods of German philosophical prose tend to have the logical function of demarcating what the author regards as a complete thought. But it must be admitted that greater readability results from such a policy. Translation always involves trade-offs, and this is one that I was eventually, though not initially, willing to make.

I have frequently added quotation marks to signal that an author is not speaking in his own voice. I resorted to this expedient quite often in Fichte's essays, since he repeatedly finds himself obliged to summarize his opponents' views before subjecting them to his own special brand of withering criticism. Since many readers would be confused by such abrupt changes of voice, I put these passages in quotation marks.

It just so happens that much of what I have translated, despite its philosophical and religious depths, is not especially technical in nature, and thus no single vocabulary is used throughout all of the selections included in this volume. Consequently, I have let context dictate most of my translation choices. Although many of these choices were fairly straightforward, I have prepared a German-English glossary for those who interest themselves in such minutiae. Fortunately, most readers will not need to consult it. In any event, my glossary is rather short. There is not much point in belaboring what borders on the obvious.

Nonetheless, two of my translation choices merit brief discussion. First, the German noun *Glaube* is always a problem, since it can be translated as “belief” or “faith”. Once again, context has been my guide, but I can only assume that some readers will be of the opinion that there are places in which I should have chosen the more religiously charged “faith” instead of the more epistemologically neutral “belief”. Since I have invariably translated *Glaube* as either “belief” or “faith” (and have translated no other German noun with either of these two English terms), those readers who are at times unhappy with “belief” may mentally substitute “faith” as they read along. I hereby affirm that I shall not take offense at such license.

Second, I found it necessary to translate the German phrase *ins Unendliche* with the Latin phrase *in infinitum*. Because I could think of no comparably felicitous English phrase, I was forced to use Latin in flagrant violation of my policy never to translate German with anything but English. Such is the lot of the translator, for compromise beckons at every moment. Sometimes, alas, it is necessary to give in.

Because every translation involves interpretation to a greater or lesser extent, I have not burdened the reader with explanatory notes. I have found it necessary, however, to insert interpolations whenever it seemed to me that it was necessary to do more than creatively translate the original German. I have kept these interpolations to a minimum, and they are always contained within square brackets.

For those who wish to compare my efforts with the German texts themselves, in the heading of each translated selection I have included an abbreviated reference to the German edition that I have used, along with the relevant series and volume number (if any) and page numbers of the entire piece. I have used abbreviations for the sources I have cited, the main three being:

GA = *J. G. Fichte: Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*. (ed.) Reinhard Lauth, Hans Jacob, and Hans Gliwitzky. Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt: Frommann, 1964–.

FG = *Fichte im Gespräch*. (ed.) Erich Fuchs, Reinhard Lauth, and Walter Schieche. Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt: Frommann–Holzboog, 1991.

SFA = *Die Schriften zu J. G. Fichte's Atheismus-Streit*. (ed.) Hans Lindau. Munich: Georg Müller, 1913.

Other abbreviations may be found on the Abbreviations page above.

I have included the individual German page numbers in corner brackets throughout the translations. Their position in my translations corresponds as closely as possible to the page breaks of my German sources.

A few words of thanks are in order. Yolanda commented on every aspect of my translations. Her suggestions greatly improved the final product, and I am thus deeply indebted to her. I am very grateful for all of the help that I received from friends and colleagues over the years; however, of course, I alone am ultimately responsible for the form and content of the translations.

My final thanks go to my parents, Larry and Sarah Bowman, who died much too soon. Unfortunately, they did not live to see the publication of this book.

CURTIS BOWMAN

January 2009

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Commentator's Preface

I encountered the philosophy of J. G. Fichte when I was an undergraduate student at the University of Kentucky in 1986. Daniel Breazeale was offering a course in German idealism. The class was cancelled because only three students registered, but Professor Breazeale offered to hold my hand during my first lonesome foray into the world of German idealism. At that time, I had read very little Kant and had never heard of Fichte. Today, I still find myself as fascinated with Fichte's philosophy as I did twenty-three years ago.

Fichte's *Religionslehre* always interested me because I believe it cuts to the living heart of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*: the concept of intellectual intuition. When Curtis Bowman first suggested that we collaborate on a joint translation-commentary on the atheism dispute, I was more than enthusiastic to participate. Through the years that we have been working on this project, I have learned far more about Fichte's *Religionslehre* and about his *Wissenschaftslehre* as a whole than I could have anticipated when Curtis and I began. I have also been made more aware of the still-unplumbed depth of my ignorance regarding both the *Religionslehre* and the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Nonetheless, this deep study of the atheism dispute has confirmed certain guiding principles of my approach to Fichte: Specifically, that understanding the *Wissenschaftslehre* requires a study of the *Religionslehre* and that the *Wissenschaftslehre* remained a consistent, continuous philosophy throughout Fichte's development.

I hope that this book will serve to interest the Fichte veteran without intimidating the Fichte beginner. Since I knew that I would probably fail to accomplish both goals, I have tended to err rather too much on the side of assisting the first-time Fichte reader. From my own perspective, I feel rather like a beginner again after having completed this project, but I am happy for what I have learned from it. Moreover, I am immensely grateful to Daniel Breazeale for introducing me to our common philosophical obsession and to Curtis Bowman for persisting with me through our joint philosophical exploration, for his enviable knowledge of the German language and for his long-suffering collegial fidelity.

YOLANDA ESTES

June 2009

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Curtis Bowman gratefully acknowledges Katherine Arens and Jeff Kinlaw for their helpful suggestions in the early stages of the translation process; and Dan Breazeale for assisting with some of the thornier questions and enlisting the advice of Professor Fuchs, who then graciously provided useful solutions to them.

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Chronology: The Atheism Dispute (1798–1800)

1798

Fichte begins “Platner” Lectures (21 February)

Fichte’s *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre* published (21 March)

Fichte’s *System of Ethics* published (March)

Nicolai’s *Life and Opinion of Sempronius Gundibert* published (April)

Fichte begins “Logic and Metaphysics” Lectures (May)

Fichte and Family visit Karlsbad, Eger, and Ronneburg (July–August)

Fichte works in Jena (August–September)

Fichte visits Dresden and Rammenau (17 September–30 September)

Fichte begins “*Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*,” “Logic and Metaphysics,” and “Sophism” Lectures (Fall)

Fichte’s “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance” published in *Philosophisches Journal* (Fall)

Forberg’s “Development of the Concept of Religion” published in *Philosophisches Journal* (Fall)

G’s *A Father’s Letter to his Student Son about Fichte’s and Forberg’s Atheism* published (Fall)

High Consistory of Dresden complains about Forberg’s Essay to Saxon Elector Friedrich August (29 October)

Friedrich August orders Confiscation of *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten* Vol. VIII, No. 1 (19 November)

Confiscation of *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten* Vol. VIII, No. 1 announced in Leipzig (26 November)

Friedrich August sends “Saxon Letter of Requisition to the Weimar Court” (18 December)

Friedrich August sends “Saxon Requisition Letter to the Dukes of the Ernestine Courts” (18 December)

Duke Karl August sends “Weimar Rescript to the University of Jena” (27 December)

1799

Fichte sends Announcement of *Appeal to the Public* to Newspapers (9 January)

University Prorector Paulus directs Fichte and Niethammer to prepare Defense (10 January)

- Fichte's *Appeal to the Public* published (15 January)
 Fichte sends *Appeal to the Public* to 150–200 Scholars including Jacobi, Reinhold, Bouterwek, Spalding, and Lavater (16 January)
 Fichte sends *Appeal to the Public* to Karl August (19 January)
 Erroneous Reports about Confiscation of *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten* Vol. VIII, No. 2 in Leipzig (January)
 Lavater begins Letter to Fichte (7 February)
 Lavater sends Letter to Fichte (12 February)
 Jacobi begins *Jacobi to Fichte* (3 March)
 Fichte finishes "*Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*" Lectures (14 March)
 Fichte and Niethammer send *Juridical Defense* to Ernestine Dukes (18 March)
 Jacobi sends *Jacobi to Fichte* (21 March)
 Fichte sends Letter to Voigt threatening Resignation (22 March)
 Reinhold begins "Letter to Fichte" (27 March)
 Karl August sends Rescript to University of Jena reprimanding Fichte and Niethammer and accepting Fichte's "Resignation" (29 March)
 Paulus informs Fichte of Dismissal (2 April)
 Duke Ernst II. Ludwig sends "Gotha Rescript to the University of Jena" (3 April)
 Reinhold sends "Letter to Fichte" (6 April)
 Students of the University of Jena send "First Petition to Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach" (20 April)
 Karl August sends "First Reply to the University of Jena" (20 April)
 I. H. Fichte suffers Illness (24 April)
 Fichte's *Juridical Defense* published (May)
 Fichte departs for Berlin (3 July)
 Berlin Police question Fichte (5 July)
 I. H. Fichte recovers from Illness (21 August)
 Kant's "Declaration" against Fichte published (28 August)
 Jacobi's *Jacobi to Fichte* published (September)
 Reinhold's "Letter to Fichte" published as *Circular Letter to J. C. Lavater and J. G. Fichte about the Belief in God* (September)
 Fichte returns to Jena (4 December)

1800

- Fichte's "From a Private Letter" published (January)
 Students of the University of Jena send "Second Petition to Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach" (10 January)
 Karl August sends "Second Reply to the University of Jena" (10 January)
 Fichte's *Vocation of Man* published (January)
 Fichte emigrates to Berlin (19 March)
 Fichte's "Concluding Remark by the Editor" published (September)

Commentator's Introduction

J. G. Fichte, *Atheismusstreit*,
Wissenschaftslehre, and *Religionslehre*

J. G. Fichte

Johann Gottlieb Fichte was born on 19 May 1762 in Rammenau, Saxony.¹ His parents, Christian and Maria Dorothea, supplemented their cottage garter-weaving industry by farming.² Christian Fichte's eldest and favorite child proved sensitive, excitable, and bright. When he was about nine years old, little Fichte's intellectual gift was recognized by the Baron von Miltitz, who sponsored the child's education in the hope that he would become a village parson.³ The Baron arranged for Fichte to attend the *Stadtschule* in Meißen and then the elite *Schulpforta*. Although his academic performance was exemplary, the boy—embarrassed by his status as a charity case—was sometimes unhappy, at one point running away from *Schulpforta*.⁴

After graduating from the *Gymnasien*, Fichte studied in Jena, Leipzig, and Wittenberg. However, since he showed no sign of assuming a pastorate in the immediate future, and since the Baron von Miltitz had died, the Widow von Miltitz suspended support for her headstrong ward's education.⁵ Between 1785 and 1794, Fichte served (like many other talented young men of his day) as a rootless tutor, eking a living from affluent households in Zürich, Krakow, and various Saxon towns. Once, on the eve of his twenty-sixth birthday, he fell into a nearly suicidal depression. The two bright moments during this dismal period of Fichte's life were his discovery of Immanuel Kant's critical philosophy, which released him

¹ For biographies of Fichte, see FSCP and Robert Adamson, *Fichte* (Edinburgh/London: Blackwood, 1881).

² Christian Fichte (1737–1812) and Johanna Maria Dorothea Fichte, born Schurich (1739–1813) wove *Strumpfbänder*, or garters for stockings.

³ Ernst Haubold von Miltitz (1739–1774).

⁴ Young Fichte was dismayed by his father's plea that he sell garters to the other boys at school, fearing he would be mercilessly mocked. He did run away from school, after reading *Robinson Crusoe*, but he had regrets—allegedly stopping to pray for guidance—and returned on the same day.

⁵ Henriette Luise von Miltitz (1741–1809).

from the trammels of material determinism and fatalism, and his introduction to Johanne Rahn, who accepted his pledge of affection and marriage.⁶

From 1785 until 1793, Fichte struggled to survive. At one point, he broke off his engagement to Johanne, asking her to seek a worthier suitor. He made an arduous trek to Königsberg, where, with brass burnished by desperation, he solicited Kant's moral and economic assistance. Although Kant rebuffed the plea for economic assistance, he helped Fichte secure a publisher for his first book, *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation* (1792).⁷ Finally, in 1793, spirits bolstered, Fichte returned to Zürich and married the long-suffering Johanne. Shortly afterwards, he received word that the University of Jena was considering him as a replacement for K. L. Reinhold, who intended to relinquish his prestigious chair in critical philosophy.⁸ In 1794, Fichte was ensconced in Jena as a professor of philosophy specially appointed by the Weimar Court of Duke Karl August.⁹ He immediately began lectures on a new philosophy, his own distinctive interpretation of transcendental idealism, which he called *Wissenschaftslehre*.¹⁰

Although Fichte's Jena period (1794–1800) was marked by academic successes, such as his prolific creativity and his extraordinary popularity among the students, and by domestic joys, such as the birth of his first and only child, Immanuel Hermann Fichte, there was rarely a moment when Fichte was not embroiled in some acrid literary dispute with his critics or subjected to some spurious political

⁶ Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) was the founder of transcendental idealism and a professor of philosophy in Königsberg. Transcendental idealism was a philosophy that explained experience by appealing to necessary and universal aspects of the human mind as opposed to metaphysical idealism, which tries to explain experience by appealing to an ideal or spiritual substance. By and large, unless specified otherwise, “idealism,” “transcendental idealism,” and “critical philosophy” are used interchangeably in both the commentaries and texts of this book.

Marie Johanne Fichte, born Rahn (1755–1819) was the daughter of a public weigher, Johann Hartmann Rahn (1721–1795).

⁷ ACR (GA, I, 1, pp. 15–161).

⁸ Karl Leonard Reinhold (1793–1855) was an enthusiastic and respected proponent of transcendental idealism.

⁹ Karl August (1757–1828) Duke of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach. There were certain “extraordinary” professors, who were appointed directly by the courts of Karl August and other noble patrons of the University of Jena rather than by the university administration.

¹⁰ As is standard in Fichte scholarship, *Wissenschaftslehre*, the name of Fichte's philosophy, is left untranslated. This name includes the words, *Wissen* [knowledge], *Wissenschaft* [science or scientific knowledge], and *Lehre* [theory or doctrine]. “Science” [*Wissenschaft*], for Fichte and his contemporaries, means “an organized system of knowledge.” Thus, a *Wissenschaftslehre* would provide the basic assumptions and parameters of any science. The *Wissenschaftslehre* was not a single book or part of philosophy but was Fichte's entire philosophy, which he presented in many different expositions. Fichte's WLN (WLN [K] and WLN [H]) is a presentation of the basic principles of the *Wissenschaftslehre*.

accusation from his enemies.¹¹ Rumors abounded of Fichte's alleged democratic and antireligious tendencies.¹² Fichte's ill-fated campaign against the student "orders" in 1795 culminated in student riots, military intervention, and the retreat of the Fichte family to Oßmannstedt.¹³ Despite these difficulties, Fichte was productive, completing many significant philosophical works, including *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre* (1794–95), *Foundations of Natural Right* (1796–97), and *System of Ethics* (1798), and was charismatic, lecturing to eager audiences one hundred, and even four hundred, strong.¹⁴ However, the publication of Fichte's "On the Ground of our Belief in a Divine World-Governance" and Friedrich Karl Forberg's "Development of the Concept of Religion" led to allegations of atheism in 1798 and eventually to the calamity known as the *Atheismsstreit*, or atheism dispute, which reached its nadir with Fichte's forced resignation from his position in 1799.¹⁵

Fichte emigrated to Berlin in 1800. During his first year in Berlin, he completed *The Vocation of Man* (1800), his response to the criticisms leveled against him during the atheism dispute. He also worked intensively on new presentations of the *Wissenschaftslehre* and became deeply involved in freemasonry, which he regarded as a potential instrument for moral, social, and political enlightenment. Fichte was appointed as a professor in Erlangen in 1805, but the French occupation forced him to flee to Königsberg in 1806 and then, to Copenhagen in 1807. During this period, Fichte was often separated from his wife and child, who was somewhat sickly, and Johanne was hard-pressed to make ends meet. Nonetheless, despite nearly

¹¹ Immanuel Hermann (Hartmann) Fichte (1796–1879) became a philosopher and edited his father's works. For historical accounts of Fichte's Jena period, see FSCP; see also Daniel Breazeale's introductions to EPW and WLM.

¹² These charges were often instigated by the mostly anonymous publications of the reactionary journal *Eudämonia, oder Deutsches Volksglück*. These rumors sometimes led to formal charges, such as the charge raised by the Jena Consistory that Fichte was violating the Sabbath by holding mid-morning lectures on Sunday.

¹³ The student "orders" were secret, illegal clubs, or fraternities, at the University of Jena. They often inflicted violence on the members of rival orders, the students and professors, and the townspeople. Due to the unique status of the university as a state school, the divisions between town and gown, and the covert nature of the orders, the town and university had little control over the fraternal organizations. Fichte attempted to disband the orders and obtain a truce between, and an amnesty for, their former members. For a detailed discussion, see FSCP, pp. 249–69, 333, 368, 404, and 413.

¹⁴ *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794) [*Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*] (GA, I, 2, pp. 249–451); FNR (GA, I, 3, pp. 311–460 and GA, I, 4, pp. 3–165); SE (GA, I, 5, pp. 1–314).

¹⁵ "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," pp. 21–29 (GA, I, 5, pp. 347–57); "Development of the Concept of Religion," pp. 37–47 (SFA, pp. 37–58). Friedrich Karl Forberg (1770–1848) was briefly an adjunct teacher at the University of Jena and then a Lyceum Rector in Saalfeld.

constant distractions, Fichte remained active, completing a series of lectures on the *Way to the Blessed Life: Or also, the Religionslehre* (1806).¹⁶

In 1807, after the Peace of Tilsit, Fichte returned to Berlin.¹⁷ The coming years were difficult: Fichte was often unwell, suffering a serious illness in the summer of 1808. Although he eventually secured a position as a professor and the dean of the philosophical faculty—and briefly, as the rector—at the newly formed University of Berlin, he resigned his rectorship in 1812, beginning work on what would prove the final version of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Fichte lost both parents in the space of two years, Christian in 1812 and Marie Dorothea in 1813. During the same year, the Prussian uprising against Napoleon forced Fichte to suspend lectures on the *Wissenschaftslehre*. In 1814, Fichte's wife brought home a fever—probably typhus—that she contracted while nursing wounded Prussian soldiers. Johanne survived, but Fichte died at 5 a.m. on 29 January 1814.

Atheismusstreit

Traditionally, the atheism dispute has been considered to be a turning point in Fichte's development, marking the distinction between an early transcendental idealism with atheistic implications and a later absolute idealism with theistic implications.¹⁸ However, if one subjects Fichte's early and later philosophical writings to a sensitive investigation, one discovers many grounds for asserting continuity rather than discontinuity throughout the various versions of *Wissenschaftslehre*.¹⁹ Moreover, if Fichte is taken at his word, the early and the later *Religionslehre*, as well as the early and later *Wissenschaftslehre*, should be regarded as alternative presentations of a single system derived from one fundamental insight, which he called intellectual intuition.²⁰

Ostensibly, the atheism dispute hinged on the question of whether or not Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* was an atheistic doctrine. Although religious issues were certainly at stake during the atheism dispute, the conflict cannot be reduced to a purely theological debate. Moreover, Fichte's unique religious theory, or *Religionslehre*, is perplexing. He rejected many conventional religious notions,

¹⁶ ASL.

¹⁷ On 9 July of 1807, Napoléon I. Bonaparte (1769–1821), the Emperor of France, signed a treaty with Prussia.

¹⁸ For more details on the history of the atheism dispute see FSCP, pp. 368–424 and Daniel Breazeale's introduction to EPW. The absolute idealists attempted to eliminate the inherent dualities of human consciousness.

¹⁹ I. H. Fichte remained convinced of the overall unity of his father's philosophy. For a very early argument for this position see Anna Boynton Thompson, *The Unity of Fichte's Doctrine of Knowledge* (Boston: Ginn, 1895).

²⁰ Fichte employed intellectual intuition, or the concept of immediate, nonsensible consciousness, as the foundation or first principle of his philosophy. See below.

such as a divine creation of the world, the substantiality and personality of a deity, and the temporal or eternal retribution of a supreme being. Nonetheless, by his own terms, he was neither an agnostic nor an atheist. By any ordinary definition of the terms, he was also neither a deist nor a theist. Fichte had a concept of God, which he took to be fundamental to religion, so his position was not agnostic or atheistic; but his concept of God presupposed a divine relation to man, so his position was not deistic; and it precluded a divine personality, so his position was not theistic.

Actually, in addition to religious issues, the atheism dispute concerned the ethical implications of transcendental idealism, and particularly, the question of whether the *Wissenschaftslehre* entailed social anarchy and personal despair. The controversy, like the Spinozism dispute beforehand and the pantheism dispute afterward, was one among many controversies that called into question the ultimate compatibility of human belief and knowledge—and indeed, of human welfare and enlightenment—presaging the eventual disintegration of the already fragmented German Enlightenment, or *Aufklärung*.²¹ During the dispute, various representatives of the *Aufklärung* came forward to articulate their diverse visions of enlightenment in opposition to Fichte's. Some of these representatives were other transcendental idealists, such as Forberg and Reinhold.²² Others, such as Jacobi and Lavater, spoke for the more fideistic or pietistic aspects of the *Aufklärung*.²³ Then again, others, such as the anonymous author of the *Father's Letter*, stood for the movement of *Popularphilosophie*.²⁴ Finally, the dispute revealed tensions between the political agendas, social authority, and cultural enlightenment of the European

²¹ The Spinozism dispute (1783–1787) began with a debate about the alleged Spinozism of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781). The pantheism dispute (1811) concerned the supposed pantheism of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854) and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831). For a discussion of the many facets of enlightenment, see Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

²² “Development of the Concept of Religion,” pp. 37–47 (SFA, pp. 37–58); “Letter to Fichte,” pp. 134–43 (GA, III, 3, pp. 307–320). Karl Leonhard Reinhold (1757–1823) was a transcendental idealist who influenced Fichte and briefly adopted his philosophy.

²³ Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743–1819) was a fideist novelist who criticized Fichte during the atheism dispute. Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741–1801) was a pietistic physiognomist who criticized Fichte during the atheism dispute. See Commentary on “Letter to Fichte,” pp. 125–33; Commentary on “From a Private Letter,” pp. 245–51; and Commentary on “Concluding Remark by the Editor,” pp. 269–75.

²⁴ *Popularphilosophie*, or common sense philosophy, was a movement influenced by both British empiricism and continental rationalism that presupposed philosophy could be made comprehensible to common sense and could justify the basic notions accepted by common sense. See *A Father's Letter to his Student Son about Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism*, pp. 57–75 (GA, I, 6, pp. 121–38).

princes, and particularly, of the Saxon dukes.²⁵ Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* stood between these factions as both a product of the *Aufklärung* and a reaction to its points of tension and weakness. As the self-proclaimed author of the "first philosophy of freedom," Fichte tested the ethos of his century, leading many of his contemporaries to ask whether the *Wissenschaftslehre* was a harmful doctrine of social anarchism, ideological nihilism, and amoral egoism.

The atheism dispute forced Fichte from an elite position within the inner circle of intelligentsia to an inferior position on the margin of academia; and thus, however slight its influence on his philosophical development, it had a profound impact on his economic and social condition as well as on his scholarly career and method. After Fichte's expulsion from Jena, his intermittent employment never steadied the always precarious family fortunes. Although Fichte retained some philosophical influence, he suffered considerable social and intellectual isolation. The *Wissenschaftslehre* did not change, but Fichte altered his approach to philosophical communication, attempting to reach the learned man through popular discourse and becoming suspicious of anything but direct, oral interaction between the philosophical spokesman and his audience. These profound changes in Fichte's relation to the philosophical community, the educated public, and the larger social world were initiated by the publication of two essays in a rarefied, fairly obscure, philosophical journal.

In the fall of 1798, Fichte and F. I. Niethammer published "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance" by Fichte and "Development of the Concept of Religion" by F. K. Forberg, a self-styled proponent of the critical philosophy, in the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten*, which they co-edited.²⁶ Fichte had entertained some misgivings about publishing Forberg's essay, mostly because he feared that readers might perceive the article as a statement of his own religious position. Indeed, he had originally asked Forberg to withdraw the essay or, at least, to allow an editorial emendation in footnotes. As Forberg insisted on publishing the essay without alteration, and as the co-editors of the journal were loathe to suppress a fellow idealist's arguments, Forberg's essay was published but preceded by Fichte's in order to avoid any conflation of the two philosophers' views. It is doubtful that either the authors of the essays or the editors of the journal could have anticipated the repercussions of these decisions, because it is improbable that these two scholarly articles would have attracted any extra-philosophical notice had not an anonymously authored pamphlet, *A Father's*

²⁵ See Commentary on "Saxon Letter of Requisition to the Weimar Court" and "Weimar Rescript to the University of Jena," pp. 77–82; and Commentary on "Gotha Rescript to the University of Jena," pp. 205–12.

²⁶ Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer (1766–1848) was a professor of philosophy at the University of Jena and the founder of the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten*, a journal devoted to transcendental idealism or critical philosophy.

Letter to his Student Son about Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism, been widely distributed immediately after the publication of the *Philosophisches Journal*.²⁷

The *Father's Letter* was a maudlin tract, wherein a fictitious father cautioned his son that Fichte and Forberg were promulgating atheism, encouraging rebellion, and undermining morality among naive, impressionable students at the University of Jena. Shortly after the unnamed "Father's" missive appeared, members of the Dresden High Consistory complained to the Saxon Elector, Friedrich August that the *Philosophisches Journal* contained atheistic statements.²⁸ In November of 1798, Friedrich August responded by issuing a confiscation rescript and by posting a formal letter to the Ernestine Dukes of Saxony, including Karl August, the Duke of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach.²⁹ In his rescript, Friedrich August forbade distribution of the journal on pain of law, and in his letter, he advised the Ernestine Dukes that if Fichte, Forberg, and Niethammer were not punished and investigated

²⁷ *A Father's Letter to his Student Son about Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism*, pp. 57–75 (GA, I, 6, pp. 121–38).

²⁸ The Dresden High Consistory was comprised of representatives of the Lutheran and Evangelical Christian churches. It administrated church matters in the Electorate of Saxony and advised Friedrich August (1750–1827) the Elector of Saxony, a Catholic.

²⁹ "Kurfürstl. Sächsisches Requisitions-schreiben an die Herzöge der Ernestischen Höfe vom 18 Dezembre 1798" ["Electoral Saxon Requisition Letter to the Dukes of the Ernestine Courts of 18 December 1798"] in "Acta Die Confiscirung und Censur, ingleichen die Leipziger und andere Zeitungen btr. Vol. XII 1798–1800, Loc. 55 n. 8 der Geheimen Canzley in K. S. Hauptstaats-Archiv," p. 59; Friedrich August: "Saxon Requisition Letter to the Weimar Court," pp. 83–84 (FG, 2, pp. 25–26, No. 697); "Friedrich August III von Sachsen an die Universität Leipzig" ["Friedrich August III of Saxony to the University of Leipzig"] of 19 November 1798 (FG, 6, p. 308, No. 685a). The Leipzig announcement was also published in the *National-Zeitung der Teutschen* (Issue 51, 20 December 1798, Coll. 1039–40) and was reprinted in *Appeal to the Public*, p. 92 [GA, I, 5, p. 415].

Friedrich August and the Ernestine Dukes are from different lines of the royal House of Wettin: Friedrich August is from the Albertine line, which traditionally supported the Catholic faith, and the Ernestine Dukes are from the Ernestine line, which traditionally supported the Protestant faith. These two lines originated because the House of Wettin had been divided into two ruling branches by the sons of the Saxon Elector Friedrich August II, Ernst (1441–1486) and Albrecht "the Bold" (1443–1500). In 1485, Ernst had founded the Ernestine line and become Elector, ruling Electoral Saxony. Albrecht had founded the Albertine line and remained Duke, ruling Ducal Saxony. Eventually, the electorship and Electoral Saxony were taken over by descendents of the Albertine line (who ascended to being Electors of Saxony) while Ducal Saxony passed into rule by descendents of the Ernestine line (who descended to being mere Dukes of Saxony). Thus, in 1798, Friedrich August, of the Albertine line, is the Elector of Saxony and ruler of Electoral Saxony whereas Karl August, of the Ernestine line, is the Duke of Saxony–Weimar and Saxony–Eisenach, two of the Ernestine duchies in Ducal Saxony. The other Ernestine Dukes were: Ernst Friedrich (1724–1800), Duke of Saxony–Coburg–Saalfeld; Ernst II Ludwig (1745–1804), Duke of Saxony–Gotha–Altenburg; Georg I (1761–1803), Duke of Saxony–Meiningen. The Ernestine Dukes were the patrons of the University of Jena.

for publishing and teaching irreligious doctrines, he would be compelled to bar his subjects from attending institutions of learning in Ducal Saxony, and particularly in Jena.³⁰ Karl August, the local noble patron of the University of Jena, complied by sending a rescript to the university, which demanded the punishment and investigation of Fichte and Niethammer for editorial, and possibly academic, negligence.³¹

In January of 1799, Fichte published an *Appeal to the Public*, exhorting the learned community to support his denial of the atheism charge.³² In March, on behest of H. E. G. Paulus, the prorector of the University of Jena, Fichte and Niethammer presented Karl August, and the other Ernestine Dukes, with a “juridical defense” of their actions as editors—and in Fichte’s case as an author—of the essays in the condemned journal.³³ While their joint defense was still under review, Fichte sent a letter to Christian Gottlob Voigt, Karl August’s privy-councilor, wherein he threatened to resign if censured for atheism.³⁴ The Ernestine Dukes unanimously condemned Fichte and Niethammer. In April, Karl August, through the University of Jena, sent Fichte and Niethammer a reprimand for negligence, which included a postscript “accepting” Fichte’s “resignation.” Fichte published his own *Juridical Defense*, but his dismissal had been formalized and finalized.³⁵ In the aftermath of the coerced resignation, both Kant and F. H. Jacobi published highly critical repudiations of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, but Fichte’s students rallied to his aid. Their petition on his behalf, signed by 280 students, was met with Karl August’s swift rebuff.³⁶

In the spring of 1800, Fichte emigrated to Berlin. A second student petition had failed to sway Karl August.³⁷ Estranged from the Jena intelligentsia, isolated from the academic mainstream, and very much alone in a tumultuous socio-political climate, Fichte clambered upward, publishing “From a Private Letter” and “Concluding Remark by the Editor,” which countered specific critiques by

³⁰ The Saxon Elector ruled the Electorate of Saxony whereas Saxon Dukes ruled their own duchies in Ducal Saxony.

³¹ “Weimar Rescript to the University of Jena,” p. 84 (FG, 6.1, p. 316, No. 702a). All of the Ernestine Dukes were patrons of the University of Jena, but as Jena was in the Duchy of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach, the university was under Karl August’s special protection.

³² *Appeal to the Public*, pp. 92–125 (GA, I, 5, pp. 415–53).

³³ Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus (1761–1851) was a professor of theology at the University of Jena.

³⁴ Christian Gottlob (von) Voigt (1743–1813).

³⁵ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 157–204 (GA, I, 6, pp. 26–84).

³⁶ “First Petition to Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach,” pp. 220–26 (FG, 6.1, pp. 419–27) and “First Reply to the University of Jena,” p. 227 (FG, 6.1, pp. 435–36, No. 823b.).

³⁷ “Second Petition to Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach,” pp. 227–31 (FG, 6.2, pp. 498–99) and “Second Reply to the University of Jena,” p. 231 (FG, 6.2, p. 507, No. 990c.).

his detractors, and the *Vocation of Man*, which offered his definitive reply to the atheism dispute.³⁸ Much later, in 1806, he revisited the subject of God and religion in the *Way to the Blessed Life: Or also, the Religionslehre*, his final statement on the philosophy of religion.

Wissenschaftslehre

One cannot understand the more subtle features of Fichte's *Religionslehre*, without understanding its relation to his *Wissenschaftslehre* as a whole. According to Fichte, philosophy should explain human life: human consciousness, or the "system of representations accompanied by a feeling of necessity."³⁹ As an explanation of life, transcendental idealism proves no facts experienced within life but only demonstrates the relation between those facts within thinking. The *Wissenschaftslehre* shows that objective consciousness is an aspect of subjective consciousness by deriving awareness of things from awareness of self, or as Fichte calls it, the "I."⁴⁰

Since life is the explanandum and philosophy the explanans, life stands outside philosophy: "LIVING is, strictly speaking, NOT-PHILOSOPHIZING; PHILOSOPHIZING is, strictly speaking, NOT-LIVING."⁴¹ Nonetheless, the standpoint of life, or experience, employs concepts and principles that can only be explained at the standpoint of philosophy, or the transcendental standpoint; and philosophy presupposes feelings, intuitions, and beliefs that can only be discovered at the standpoint of life, or the empirical standpoint.⁴²

The path from life to the standpoint of philosophy begins with a basic intuition that anyone can produce by following a simple instruction. "Think the concept of the I and think of yourself as you do this," postulates Fichte. "Construct the concept of the I and observe how you accomplish this."⁴³ Whether or not we think about ourselves depends entirely on our free decision; but if we think about

³⁸ "From a Private Letter" pp. 252–67 (GA, I, 6: pp. 369–89) and "Concluding Remark by the Editor," pp. 276–81 (GA, I, 6, pp. 411–16).

³⁹ *An Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre, 1797/98*: "First Introduction," IWL, p. 8 (GA, I, 4, p. 186).

⁴⁰ For Fichte's account of philosophical task and method, see *An Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre, 1797/98* in IWL, pp. 2–118 (GA, I, 4, pp. 183–281).

⁴¹ "A Fragment," EPW, p. 435 (GA, III, 3, p. 333, No. 440).

⁴² For Fichte's discussion of the difference between the standpoint of philosophy and the standpoint of life, see "To Reinhold," EPW, pp. 428–37 (GA, III, 3, pp. 325–33, No. 440).

⁴³ WLN, pp. 110 and 119 (WLN [K], pp. 28 and 34). Fichte uses the terms *Ich* [I] and *Ich-heit* [I-hood] to refer to the self-reverting, self-reflecting activity of consciousness or self-hood.

ourselves, we engage in an act of self-reflection; and if we engage in this self-reverting activity, we think about ourselves. This recognition that I-hood and self-reverting activity are identical arises nonsensibly and immediately: It is an intellectual intuition. Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* begins with a preliminary definition of subjective consciousness as a philosophical intellectual intuition of the I's self-reverting activity. The motor that drives the *Wissenschaftslehre* is the question: How does the I discover itself as active? This question propels the central argument of the *Wissenschaftslehre* forward toward progressively richer but more distilled concepts of I-hood.⁴⁴ These concepts are, in turn, restricted and focused by the principle of determinability, which stipulates that something specific (or determinate) must be conceived in contrast to something general (or determinable).⁴⁵ Thus, the philosophical concept of the I generates a series of dualities: intelligence and will, real (objective) and ideal (subjective) thinking, and ideal (conceptualizing or theoretical) and real (practical) activity.⁴⁶

The I discovers itself as active by willing; but willing presupposes the concept of a goal, which, in turn presupposes the concept of an object; and the concept of an object presupposes willing.⁴⁷ In other words, I become aware of myself as free when I will: but I can only will insofar as I possess a goal, which I only have insofar as I am aware of something that restricts my freedom (and needs to be altered); and I am only aware of something that restricts my freedom when I will. The only way out of this seemingly vicious circle is to postulate a type of will that contains the concept of a goal, or a *pure will*. However, the concept of pure will—if it is to be thought at all—must be thought as something determinate, not as the concept of some willing in general but as the concept of some will in particular; and thus, the concept of pure will must be limited in thinking (or what is the same thing, *felt in consciousness*) as an individual will. We cannot think of *pure* willing, which is wholly intelligible, as being limited sensibly by *something* but only as being limited intelligibly by *someone*, that is, by another will.

⁴⁴ This approach is most apparent in WLNK, but can also be observed in FNR and SE.

⁴⁵ WLNK, pp. 126–27 (WLNK [K], pp. 38–39 and WLNK [H], p. 36). Fichte borrowed this principle from the “critical” skeptic (a skeptic informed by transcendental idealism as opposed to a pre-critical skeptic) Salomon ben Josua Maimon (1754–1800). See Maimon, *Versuch einer neuen Logik oder Theorie des Denkens* (Berlin: Felisch, 1794), pp. 20, 310–14, and 433.

⁴⁶ For a discussion of the relation between the ideal and real thinking and the ideal and real activity of the I, see Günter Zöllner, *Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy: The Original Duplicity of Intelligence and Will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁴⁷ For a detailed account of intellectual intuition, the five-fold synthesis (see below), and the pure will (see below), see Yolanda Estes, “Real Intellectual Intuition, the Philosophical Concept of the I, and the Pure Will in Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre Nova Methodo*” in *New Essays on Fichte's later Wissenschaftslehre*, (ed.) Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002).

Pure willing is limited, or felt, as a particular (determinate) rational will in relation to a general (determinable) world of rational being by means of an intellectual intuition of another will; the particular rational will, which is not wholly intelligible, is limited, or felt, as a determinate sensible object (or body) in relation to a determinable world of material being. Thus, for Fichte, the standpoint of life can be explained on the basis of a synthesis of the individual rational will, a world of rational being, the particular sensible body, and a world of material being, which are united by an intellectual intuition occasioned by a summons from another rational will. At the standpoint of philosophy, this five-fold synthesis is simply a philosophical postulate or hypothesis, which cannot provide any explanation of human consciousness unless it appears as a fact, or real intellectual intuition, at the standpoint of life.

A real intellectual intuition does occur, because, in life, we encounter other human beings, who use sensible gestures to affect our sensible bodies and thereby, solicit deference to their intelligible wills. These solicitations, or summonses, express particular instantiations of the moral law.⁴⁸ When we become aware of another will like our own, we recognize that we are obliged to respect that will by acting in a particular manner, or fulfilling a specific duty. Moreover, when we become aware of our obligation to fulfill a particular duty, we reflect on ourselves, recognizing ourselves as the type of (free) beings capable of fulfilling our duties. In moral consciousness, by virtue of interactions with other human beings: We discover ourselves as free, as active. Thus, the ideal, abstract starting point of the *Wissenschaftslehre* has a real, concrete incidence in life. It is the familiar form of self-reverting activity that we encounter in our quotidian moral consciousness.⁴⁹ We believe immediately and certainly in this activity insofar as we perform it every day: It is not a conceptual object of knowledge but the intuitive foundation of all belief and thus, of all knowledge.

For Fichte, the real intellectual intuition of the moral law, or the feeling of freedom, which is initiated by the summons issued by another free being, provides an extra-philosophical sanction for the philosophical intellectual intuition, or concept of I-hood, which constitutes the starting point of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. These two types of intellectual intuition are similar in structure insofar as each involves a self-reverting activity that produces a concept of the I as free, or active. Philosophy explains life by showing that the principles and concepts employed in life, such as space, causality, substantiality and the like, can be derived from this fundamental intuition. Life confirms this philosophical derivation by providing its

⁴⁸ WLN, p. 469 (WLN [K], p. 241 and WLN [H], p. 263). Fichte's notion of a moral law is similar to Kant's notion of a categorical imperative. The moral law commands us to act autonomously, or to respect freedom in ourselves and others. The *Aufforderung* [summons] is Fichte's term for both the determination of the pure will as individuality and the solicitations between moral subjects that initiate real intellectual intuitions of the moral law.

⁴⁹ WLN, p. 465 (WLN [K] pp. 239–40 and WLN [H] pp. 260–61).

basis in intuition or belief. Intellectual intuition is the key to Fichte's philosophy, constituting both its highest level of abstraction—the five-fold synthesis—and its most basic level of feeling—the real intellectual intuition.

Fichte realizes that many philosophers reject his proposed foundation of consciousness. For example, some philosophers, the metaphysical dualists, attempt to explain consciousness on the basis of two utterly opposed substances, but their philosophies founder on their inability to explain the interaction between these substances.⁵⁰ Other philosophers, the (more consistent monistic) metaphysical materialists, or determinists, attempt to explain consciousness on the basis of material substance, but their philosophies founder on their fatalism, or inability to provide a nontrivial account of moral consciousness.⁵¹ According to Fichte, the metaphysical dualist simply has no argument against transcendental idealism, because he is philosophically inconsistent. However, the conflict between the idealist and the dogmatist cannot be resolved by philosophical argument at all, because it depends on the idealist's and the dogmatist's pre-philosophical commitments to certain fundamental beliefs.⁵²

The dogmatic philosopher is a materialist because he believes in fatalism and lives eudaemonistically.⁵³ At the standpoint of life, he is either morally oblivious or, in defiance of his own cognizance, morally remiss. He has never become aware of himself as free through a real intellectual intuition—but only as the product of material things and natural forces through sensible intuition—and thus, philosophical intellectual intuition is alien to his philosophy. The transcendental philosopher is an idealist because he believes in freedom and lives moralistically.⁵⁴ At the standpoint of life, he is either morally conscientious or, at least, morally mindful. He has become aware of himself as free—as a supersensible, self-determining power—through a real intellectual intuition and thus, philosophical intellectual intuition is central to his philosophy, and also to his philosophy of religion, or *Religionslehre*.

⁵⁰ The rationalist René Descartes (1596–1650) would be an example of this sort of philosopher. His metaphysical dualism founders on the mind-body problem: the inability to explain a speculated interaction between the human mind and brain.

⁵¹ The rationalist Baruch (or Benedict de) Spinoza (1632–1677) would be an example of such a philosopher. His metaphysical materialism leads to complete determinism and fatalism.

⁵² For a discussion of the conflict between the idealist and the dogmatist see *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre*: “First Introduction,” IWL, pp. 15–20 (GA, I, 4, pp. 191–96).

⁵³ For Fichte, “dogmatism” and “eudaemonism” are very broad terms. He uses “dogmatism” to refer to any deterministic philosophical system even if that philosophy is not actually a form of materialism. He uses “eudaemonism” to refer to any consequentialist moral theory, including utilitarianism, which regards happiness as the highest good or an end in itself.

⁵⁴ For Fichte, moralism is a duty-based, or deontological, moral theory or practice.

Religionslehre

Fichte's philosophy may be divided into three main divisions. The first part of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is theoretical philosophy, which explains "how the world is and must be" for us.⁵⁵ The second part, practical philosophy, explains "how the world ought to be constructed" by us.⁵⁶ The third part, the philosophy of the postulates, includes the philosophy of right, *Rechtslehre*, and the philosophy of religion, *Religionslehre*.⁵⁷ The philosophy of religion explains the command that practical reason directs to theoretical reason: "the sensible world ought to accommodate itself to the goal of reason."⁵⁸

Fichte's *Religionslehre* shows what morality *requires* us to *believe* when we *think* about ourselves and the world. In "On the Basis of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," Fichte accounts for the origin of religious belief: the connection between the concept of God, or of an intelligible world order, and the rest of our thinking. As a philosophical explanation, the "Divine World-Governance" essay is not intended to prove that God exists or that religion is true but only to show how belief in God and religion arises within life.

In life, the moral subject becomes aware of itself as free by means of a real intellectual intuition of the moral law initiated by a summons from another free subject. If the moral subject acknowledges its duty and thus, responds to this summons by willing in accordance with the moral law, it simultaneously presupposes all of the conditions necessary to fulfill its duty. The moral subject simply believes that it has a free, self-determining will, that it has also an articulated body (a body that moves as an expression of the will), and likewise, that its will is efficacious in an intelligible world, and its body, efficacious in a sensible world.⁵⁹ Moreover, within the intelligible and sensible worlds, it presumes orders—efficient laws or powers—whereby the will and body become efficacious.

This real intellectual intuition of the moral law generates religious belief in the intelligible individual, the intelligible world, and the intelligible world order. Religious belief—faith that a moral world order governs the moral world—begins with religious practice—dutiful willing in accord with the moral law and without regard for sensible consequences. For Fichte, this belief exhausts the essence

⁵⁵ WLN, p. 468 (WLN [K], p. 241). Fichte's theoretical *Wissenschaftslehre*, or account of cognition, is part of the "foundations" of his *Wissenschaftslehre*, such as his WLN (WLN [K] and WLN [H]).

⁵⁶ WLN, p. 469 (WLN [K], p. 241 and WLN [H], p. 263). Fichte's practical *Wissenschaftslehre*, the *Sittenlehre*, or account of ethics, is presented in his SE (GA, I, 5, pp. 1–314).

⁵⁷ Fichte presents his *Rechtslehre* in FNR (GA, I, 3, pp. 311–460 and GA, I, 4, pp. 3–165).

⁵⁸ WLN, p. 471 n. H (WLN [H], p. 265).

⁵⁹ Regarding the articulated body, see WLN, p. 459 (WLN [K], p. 235 and WLN [H], pp. 256–57).

of true religious faith and this practice exhausts the essence of true religious devotion insofar as either faith or practice is considered from the standpoint of philosophy. However, he allows that theology, which regards faith and practice from the standpoint of life, is concerned with other issues, such as the historical origin of religious documents and the practical contribution of those documents to righteousness. Moreover, he allows that religious ministry, which also considers religion from the standpoint of life, is concerned with other practical activities, such as assisting ordinary people to comprehend their idea of God and to apply the implications of their religion. Any additional content that the theologian or the minister superimposes on the essence of true religion is irrelevant to the philosopher. Likewise, any such additional content is but harmless, potentially helpful, allegory provided that it coincides with true religion; but additional content that contradicts or undermines true religion is insidious cant.

Fichte's "Divine World-Governance" provides a stark and spare account of religion. In Fichte's later work on the *Religionslehre*, in the *Vocation of Man* and the *Way to the Blessed Life* he develops a more copious and substantial description of religious consciousness. In the *Vocation of Man*, he examines the relation between theoretical and practical philosophy, and between philosophy and life, more closely than in his earlier writings. In the *Way to the Blessed Life*, he describes the development of human consciousness through five levels of awareness: sensibility, legality, morality, religiosity, and philosophy. In both presentations, Fichte remains faithful to the account of religion, and of its relation to *Religionslehre* and *Wissenschaftslehre*, that he presented in "Divine World-Governance."

It is not surprising that students and scholars of Fichte's philosophy of religion want to know if Fichte was indeed an atheist or if he subscribed to some other theological position. Likewise, it is tempting to entertain historical and personal hypotheses about what might have happened during the atheism dispute if France had not been so aggressive toward Germany or Fichte had not been so audacious toward Karl August. Nonetheless, the more interesting and significant matter is what religion meant to Fichte and how it related to his philosophy as a whole. Grasping this issue exposes many others that fathom the depths and span the breadths of philosophy itself.

The *Atheismusstreit* and Fichte's *Religionslehre* constitute rich fields for contemporary scholars of Fichte, German idealism, and the Enlightenment. Anyone who eschews study of Fichte's *Religionslehre* will be denied egress to the central recess of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Any scholar wanting to solve the puzzles related to the concept of intellectual intuition or the development of the *Wissenschaftslehre* would be well-rewarded by a long and deep exploration of Fichte's *Religionslehre*. The *Atheismusstreit* and the *Religionslehre* throw into sharp relief the distinctions between Fichte's unique idealism, his predecessor Kant's transcendental idealism, and their successors Schelling and Hegel's absolute

idealism.⁶⁰ Scholars of the history of ideas would do well to investigate the wide fissures that the *Atheismusstreit* exposed in the *Aufklärung*.

Aside from the conundrums of narrow scholarly inquiry, the *Atheismusstreit* and the *Religionslehre* address various enigmas of broader philosophical inquest. These wider problems include the relation between philosophy and life and the nature of philosophical task and method. Contemporary theorists wrestling with questions about selfhood, body, duality, or intersubjectivity would benefit from discovering how Fichte's *Religionslehre* answers some of their queries. Naturally enough, the *Atheismusstreit* provides relevant fodder for recent studies in both the history and philosophy of religion.

The *Atheismusstreit* and Fichte's *Religionslehre* underscore issues concerning faith, spirituality, and tolerance, which traditional and contemporary discussions of religion neglect. In popular religious discourse, the presumption too often exists that faith precludes reasoned dialogue or that faith requires logical proof. Fichte, following his erstwhile advocates (and eventual adversaries) Kant and Jacobi, shows up the hubris of those notions by providing a faith-based account of rational religion. Likewise, popular religious dialogue generally treats natural science and non-theism as necessarily equivalent to material determinism and thus, to fatalism and areligiosity. Fichte reveals the superficiality of this view by offering a spirit-laden definition of freedom and religiosity that concurs with naturalism and non-theism. Contemporary debates about religion sometimes assume that different religions generate irreconcilable moral codes, which leads the proponents of various religions to become intolerant. Fichte's derivation of religious belief from moral sentiment topples such antediluvian justifications for bigotry and fanaticism.

Alongside purely religious queries, the *Atheismusstreit* and Fichte's *Religionslehre* raise basic, perennial ethical concerns about the relation between individual freedom, moral conviction, and human welfare. Friedrich Nietzsche and Fyodor Dostoevsky are not the first writers to claim that modern enlightenment contained the seeds of contemporary nihilism.⁶¹ Jacobi invents the term "nihilism," and he applies it to Fichte. Moreover, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Hannah Arendt are not the first philosophers to claim that a philosophy based on

⁶⁰ Schelling and Hegel taught briefly at the University of Jena. Absolute idealism was a philosophy that attempted to eliminate the duality of subject and object in the Absolute, or subject-object, as opposed to transcendental idealism, which taught that human consciousness contains ineradicable dualities of self and other, thoughts and things, and subject and object.

⁶¹ Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) was a proto-existentialist philosopher who claimed the early contemporary world was nihilistic because people had lost faith in traditional foundations of values. Fyodor Mikhaylovich Dostoevsky (1821–1881) was a proto-existentialist writer who espoused a unique form of the Russian Orthodox faith.

human freedom need not imply amorality, egoism, or mayhem.⁶² Fichte creates the “first philosophy of freedom,” and he uses it generate a vision of moral, social, and political justice. Sadly, as contemporary history attests, the Electorate of Friedrich August and the Duchy of Karl August will not be the last governments to claim that individual liberty compromises state security.⁶³

⁶² Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre (1905–1980) was an existentialist philosopher, writer, and political activist. Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986) was an existentialist philosopher, novelist, and feminist who formulated an existentialist “ethics of ambiguity.” Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) was a social and political philosopher who understood freedom as including social and political activity.

⁶³ Indeed, the University of Jena would not be the last university to sacrifice intellectual integrity for political and economic felicities.

Chapter 1

J. G. Fichte: “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance”

Commentary

In 1796, J. G. Fichte joined his colleague, Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer, in editing the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten*.¹ In the fall of 1798, the co-editors of the *Philosophisches Journal* published Fichte’s “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance” and F. K. Forberg’s “Development of the Concept of Religion.”² Fichte claimed that the two main goals of his essay were to differentiate his position from Forberg’s by showing that it did “not so much oppose his convictions as fail to arrive at them” and to expose the ground of religious belief by providing a “derivation of the convictions of the believer.”³ Fichte’s essay illuminates his position relative to other idealists, such as Kant and Forberg, and to other representatives of the enlightenment, such as the material determinists (or dogmatists) and eudaemonists.⁴

“Divine World-Governance” begins by clarifying Fichte’s assumptions about philosophical proof and religious belief, and by rejecting certain misunderstandings about philosophical proof of religious belief. Fichte distinguishes between an ordinary proof of religious belief, which tries to demonstrate the truth of that belief, and a transcendental deduction of religious belief, which tries to show the origin

¹ Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer (1766–1848) was a philosophy professor at the University of Jena and the founder of the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten*.

² “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 21–29 (GA, I, 5, pp. 347–57) and “Development of the Concept of Religion,” pp. 37–47 (SFA, pp. 37–58). Fichte’s “Ueber den Grund unsers Glaubens an eine göttliche Weltregierung” [“On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance”] was originally published in *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten* Vol. VIII, No. 1, (Jena/Leipzig: Gabler, 1798), pp. 1–20. For details regarding other versions and printings of Fichte’s essay, see the remarks by the editors of GA (GA, I, 5, p. 221).

Friedrich Karl Forberg (1770–1848).

³ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 21–22 (GA, I, 5, pp. 347–48).

⁴ Immanuel Kant (1724–1804).

of that belief.⁵ Likewise, he asserts belief is not an “arbitrary assumption” that one adopts at will, a “free decision” that one embraces by desire, or an irrational hope that one substitutes for rational conviction but rather is a fact to which one can connect to the entire system of human reason (and is a ground upon which one can base the entire system of philosophy).⁶ Moreover, he rejects any possibility of deriving the supernatural, or intelligible, world (including God) from the natural, or sensible world, affirming rather, the necessity of deriving the concept of God from the concept of the supernatural world.⁷

Fichte defines God as a divine world-governance, or a moral world order: an efficient law or power whereby morally right actions achieve a morally just end.⁸ A moral world order, as something supernatural, or intelligible, cannot be grounded on the concept of the natural, or sensible, world but must be grounded on some concept of a supernatural, or intelligible world. Such a concept, however, is included in every act of moral consciousness. The moral law commands that we freely determine our will in accordance with duty. Insofar as our wills endeavor to obey this command, our cognition demands that we acknowledge the conditions necessary for fulfilling it.⁹ These conditions include our own free will whereby we act morally, a moral order whereby moral acting becomes efficacious, and a moral world wherein the moral will exercises its efficacy.¹⁰

Conscience serves as a form—indeed the sole form—of revelation, obtained through a real intellectual intuition, whereby conviction in the reality of the supersensible world—and the moral world order, or God—is produced.¹¹ As

⁵ “Divine World-Governance,” pp. 21–22 and 25–26 (GA, I, 5, p. 348 and p. 353). Fichte rejects the arguments from motion, causality, contingency—and most particularly the theological argument—along with any other arguments that try to infer God’s nature or existence from the nature or existence of the natural world.

⁶ “Divine World-Governance,” pp. 21–22, 24–25, and 27–28 (GA, I, 5, pp. 348–9, 352, 355–56). Fichte clearly distinguishes himself from Forberg, who does regard religious belief as a matter of willing, wishing, and hoping. “Development of the Concept of Religion,” “Divine World-Governance,” pp. 41–44 (SFA, pp. 46–50).

⁷ “Divine World-Governance,” pp. 22–25 (GA, I, 5, pp. 349–52).

⁸ “Divine World-Governance,” pp. 22–24 and 26–27 (GA, I, 5, pp. 348, 351, 354–55).

⁹ “Divine World-Governance,” pp. 24–25 (GA, I, 5, p. 352).

¹⁰ “Divine World-Governance,” pp. 23–27 (GA, I, 5, pp. 350–54). Other conditions—for instance an articulated body, a sensible order, and a sensible world—are necessary as well, but deriving those conditions is the task of Fichte’s theoretical *Wissenschaftslehre* (such as, WLN). Fichte addresses the position of these other conditions in moral consciousness briefly (“Divine World-Governance,” pp. 26–27 [GA, I, 5, p. 354]).

¹¹ Conscience also serves as the sole form of revelation whereby a conviction in the reality of the natural world—and the sensible world order—is produced (“Divine World-Governance,” pp. 25–27 [GA, I, 5, pp. 353–55]). See “Commentator’s Introduction,” “Divine World-Governance,” pp. 9–13, for a discussion of the nature and role of intellectual intuition in Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*.

an intellectual intuition, this revelation serves as an ultimate ground of truth—philosophical or otherwise—which the philosopher cannot deny without “wishing to destroy his inner self” because he “simply cannot *will* to go further.”¹² Real intellectual intuition of the moral law—immediately conjoined with belief in a moral world consisting of individual moral wills and a moral world order whereby those wills become efficacious—must then be considered the original ground of religious belief in a supersensible world, of empirical belief in a sensible world, and of all scientific and philosophical knowledge.

Fichte equates genuine religiosity with belief in the moral world order, which is demonstrated by the sense of resolution under which some moral subjects perform their duty without regard for sensible consequences; whereas he equates “genuine unbelief, and godlessness” with the indecisiveness under which other moral subjects calculate the sensible consequences of moral actions prior to performing them.¹³ Thus, for Fichte, irreligion and amorality are inseparable from ethical consequentialism, which is idolatry insofar as it subordinates the voice of the intelligible God (revealed by human conscience) to the voice of the sensible man (exhibited by human egoism).¹⁴

It follows from Fichte’s argument that one cannot assume a position of agnosticism regarding God without also assuming a position of total skepticism regarding all truth and reality insofar as belief in the supersensible world grounds theoretical and practical knowledge.¹⁵ Likewise, it follows from Fichte’s concept of God that the divinity cannot possess certain determinations, or properties, such as personality and substantiality.¹⁶ Hence, the concept of God precludes personality, because a person must be conceived as finite and limited within transcendental philosophy;¹⁷ and it precludes substantiality, because substance must be conceived

¹² “Divine World-Governance,” pp. 23n. and 24 (GA, I, 5, pp. 350n. and 351). Compare *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre*: “Second Introduction,” IWL, pp. 49–50 (GA, I, 4, pp. 219–20).

¹³ “Divine World-Governance,” pp. 26–27 (GA, I, 5, pp. 354–55).

¹⁴ Fichte often refers to duty-based (or deontological morality) as “moralism” whereas he calls all forms of consequentialism (including virtue ethics and utilitarianism) “eudaemonism.” Moreover, he regards moralism as necessarily connected with spiritualism and philosophical idealism; and he regards eudaemonism as necessarily connected with sensualism and philosophical dogmatism. See, for example, *Appeal to the Public*, pp. 108–116 (GA, I, 5, pp. 434–41).

¹⁵ “Divine World-Governance,” pp. 26–27 (GA, I, 5, pp. 355–56).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ See WLN, p. 347 (WLN [H], pp. 240–41). Fichte bases this claim on a long and complex argument within the theoretical *Wissenschaftslehre*. One can attempt to grasp the essence of this argument in the following manner: One is only self-conscious insofar as one is able distinguish oneself from others, that is, insofar as one is an individual; but one is only an individual insofar as one is determined, or limited, that is, insofar as one possesses some properties and lacks others. See also, WLN, pp. 437, 445, and 452–53 (WLN [K], pp. 225–26 and 230–31).

as material and sensible (spatial) within transcendental philosophy.¹⁸ Finally, it follows that one cannot attempt to ground the moral world order on anything else—for example, a creator of the moral world order—without making it into something contingent, the product of a misguided philosophy or of a pious dream rather than the object of religious belief.¹⁹

Fichte's account of religious belief differs sharply from many of his contemporaries' positions and from his fellow idealists' positions due to Fichte's appeal to intellectual intuition as the extreme revelatory starting point and the extreme abstract center of his *Wissenschaftslehre* in general and his *Religionslehre* in particular. This places Fichte in opposition to the overweening confidence in common sense of the *Popularphilosophen* and the anti-philosophical confidence in faith of the fideists and pietists. Moreover, Fichte's account of religious belief sets him in opposition to certain other idealists. Despite Fichte's conciliatory claim that Forberg's religious position does not oppose his own and despite his confident assertion that his own philosophy "is in complete accord with Kant's and is nothing other than the Kantian philosophy properly understood," the stark contrast between the grave assurance of Fichte's "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance" and the mischievous doubt of Forberg's "On the Development of the Concept of Religion" reveals Fichte's opposition to the more skeptical aspects of both Kant's and Forberg's interpretations of transcendental idealism.²⁰ Indeed, Fichte will acknowledge near the conclusion of the atheism dispute: "The expert must admit that in Forberg's article one catches a glimpse of truly skeptical Kantian atheism. [...] It is true and obvious that the Kantian 'as if' is utterly opposed to my system."²¹

¹⁸ This claim is also based on a long and complex argument within the theoretical *Wissenschaftslehre*. See WLNm, pp. 246 and 444 (WLNm [H], pp. 106–108, 245–46; and WLNm [K], p. 226). Again, one can attempt to grasp the essence of this argument in the following manner: When we regard something as substantial, we are not referring to any of its predicates, which might all be altered without damaging its substantiality, but rather, we are referring to the space that the object occupies, which we simultaneously conceive as filled with matter.

¹⁹ "Divine World-Governance," pp. 22 and 26–27 (GA, I, 5, pp. 348 and 354–55).

²⁰ "Divine World-Governance," p. 21 (GA, I, 5, p. 347) and *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre*: "Second Introduction," IWL, p. 52 (GA, I, 4, p. 221).

²¹ "To Reinhold," EPW, p. 432 (GA III, 3, p. 330, No. 440).

Text: "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance"

<GA, I, 5, p. 347>

The author of this essay has long recognized it to be his duty to lay before the greater philosophical public, for examination and mutual deliberation, the results of his philosophizing on the subject indicated above, which up to now he has delivered in the lecture hall.²² He wanted to do this with the exactitude and precision to which every author is obliged by the holiness that the subject has for so many venerable minds; however, his time was occupied by other tasks, and carrying out his decision was moved from one time to another.

Because he has now, as co-editor of this journal, to bring before the public the following essay by an excellent philosophical writer, he discovers, on the one hand, that things have been made easier for him.²³ Since that essay agrees in many respects with his own convictions, he can appeal to that essay and permit its author to speak on his behalf. On the other hand, however, he discovers a pressing demand to explain himself, because that very essay in many other respects does not so much oppose his convictions as fail to arrive at them; and it seems quite important to him that the mode of thought with regard to this subject, which issues from his philosophical viewpoint, be completely brought before the public from the very beginning. He must, however, content himself for now with only reporting the outlines of his thinking, <348> reserving for some other time the more extensive exposition.

What has up to now almost universally confused our point of view, and perhaps will long continue to confuse it, is that we have taken the so-called moral proof of a divine world-governance (or any philosophical proof thereof) for an actual *proof*, that we seem to have assumed that belief in God should first be instilled in and demonstrated to humanity by means of those demonstrations. Poor philosophy! If the belief is not already in human beings, then I would at least like to know this much: from where, then, do your representatives—who, after all, are only human beings—themselves receive what they wish to provide us through the force of their proofs; or, if these representatives are in fact beings of a higher nature, how can they count on getting through to the rest of us and becoming intelligible to us, without presupposing in us something analogous to their belief? Things are not this way. Philosophy can only explain facts. Philosophy can by no means produce facts, except to produce itself as a fact. Just as it will hardly occur to the philosopher to persuade people that they are henceforth permitted to think of objects as matter in space and the alterations of these very objects as succeeding one another in time, it can hardly occur to him to wish to persuade them to believe

²² "Nachgelassene Schriften zu Platners *Philosophischen Aphorismen* (1794–1812)" (GA II, 4, pp. 37–353); "Ideen über Gott und Unsterblichkeit" (GA IV, 1, pp. 157–67); and "Vorlesungen über Logik und Metaphysik" (GA IV, 1, pp. 173–450).

²³ Fichte is referring to F. K. Forberg: "Development of the Concept of Religion," pp. 37–47 (SFA, pp. 37–58).

in a divine world-governance. Both come to pass without his help. He presupposes both as facts, and he is solely concerned with deriving these facts as such from the necessary activity of every rational being. Therefore, we wish our reasoning by no means to be taken for an attempt to convert the non-believer but rather to be taken for a derivation of the convictions of the believer. We are only concerned with answering the causal question: how does a human being come to have that belief?

The decisive point on which this answer depends is that this belief not be represented therein as an arbitrary assumption that a human being can make or not make as he sees fits, as a free decision to regard as true whatever his heart desires because it wishes this very thing, or as supplementing or replacing the sufficient grounds of conviction with hope. Whatever is grounded in reason is absolutely necessary; and whatever is not necessary is precisely on that account contrary to reason. Taking the latter to be true is an illusion and a dream, however piously it may be dreamt.

<349> Now where will the philosopher who presupposes that belief search for its necessary ground, which he is supposed to bring to light? Perhaps in an alleged necessity of inferring a rational creator of the sensible world from the existence or the constitution of that very world? Not at all; for he knows too well that a misguided philosophy (in the embarrassing situation of being obliged to explain something whose existence it cannot deny but whose true ground is hidden from it) is indeed capable of such an inference, but never the original understanding that stands under the guardianship of reason and under the direction of its mechanisms. Either one views the sensible world from the standpoint of ordinary consciousness, which one can also call the standpoint of natural science, or one views it from the transcendental viewpoint. In the first case, reason is obliged to limit itself to the being of the world as an absolute; the world exists, simply because it exists, and it is as it is, simply because it is as it is. This standpoint begins from an absolute being, and this absolute being is just the world; both concepts are identical. The world becomes a self-grounding whole, a whole complete in itself, and precisely for this reason an organized and organizing whole that contains in itself and its immanent laws the ground of all the phenomena occurring within itself. Insofar as only *the world and its forms* are really supposed to be explained (and we therefore find ourselves in the realm of pure—I say, *pure*—natural science), an explanation of the world and its forms that is based on the purposes of an intellect is total nonsense. Moreover, the proposition that an intellect is the creator of the sensible world is not of the slightest help to us and brings us no closer to our goal; for the proposition is not the least bit intelligible and provides us with a few empty words instead of an answer to a question that we should not have posed. Undoubtedly, the determinations of an intellect are concepts. The first intelligible word has yet to be put forward as to how the latter may be transformed into matter (as in that monstrous system of a creation out of nothing) or may modify already extant matter (as in that not much more rational system of the mere manipulation of independent, eternal matter).

If one views the sensible world from the transcendental viewpoint, then, of course, all of these difficulties disappear. Then there is no world subsisting for itself: in all that we behold, we merely view the reflection of our own inner activity. But we cannot ask for the ground of that which does not exist; <350> nothing outside of it can be assumed in order to explain it.*

<351> Consequently, there is no possible way to ascend from the sensible world to the assumption of a moral world-order—if one merely thinks the sensible world alone and does not presuppose unawares a moral order, as happened among those philosophers. Consequently, that belief would have to be grounded by our concept of a supersensible world.

There is such a concept. I find myself free of every influence of the sensible world, absolutely active in myself and through myself; consequently, I find myself as a power elevated above all that is sensible. This freedom, however, is not indeterminate; it has its goal. Only it does not receive that goal from the outside but rather posits it through itself. I myself and my necessary goal are the supersensible.

I cannot doubt this freedom and the determination thereof without surrendering myself. I cannot doubt, I say, cannot even think the possibility that it is not so, that this inner voice deceives me, or that this inner voice must first be authorized and grounded elsewhere. Consequently, with regard to this matter I cannot quibble, subtilize, or explain at all. That pronouncement is what is absolutely positive and categorical.

I can go no further if I wish not to destroy my inner self; I can go no further simply because I cannot *will* to go further. Here lies that which sets its limits on the otherwise untamed flight of reasoning, that which binds the spirit because it binds the heart. Here is the point that unites thinking and willing as one and brings harmony into my being. I could go further, simply for the sake of going further, if I wanted to set myself in contradiction with myself, for there is no immanent limit in reasoning itself. It goes forth freely *in infinitum* and must be able to do so, for I am free in all of the ways in which I express myself; and only I myself, by means of the will, can set a limit to myself. Consequently, the conviction of our moral vocation is itself already issued from a moral disposition, and is *faith*; and to that extent one is entirely correct when one says: the element of all certainty is faith. So it had to be, for morality, as certainly as this is what it is, can be constituted absolutely only through itself. By no means can it be constituted by a logically compelling thought.

I could go further if I were willing, merely theoretically, to throw myself into an unlimited, bottomless realm, absolutely renounce any <352> firm standpoint, and resign myself to finding absolutely inexplicable even that certainty, which accompanies all of my thinking and without the deep feeling of which I could not even set out to speculate. For there is no firm standpoint other than the indicated one, the one grounded not by logic but rather by our moral disposition; and if our reasoning either does not progress to this standpoint or goes beyond it, then it is a limitless ocean in which every wave is driven forward by another one.

By taking hold of that goal posited by my own being and turning it into the goal of my real action, I simultaneously posit as possible the accomplishing of that very goal through real action. Both propositions are identical, for “I intend something as a goal for myself” means “I posit it as real at some future time.” Possibility, however, is necessarily posited alongside reality. If I do not wish to deny my own being, I must intend the former, my accomplishing that goal; consequently, I must also assume the latter, its ability to be accomplished. Indeed, here it is not a case of there being first one thing and then a second one, but rather of there being an absolute unity. In fact, the two are not two acts but rather one and the same indivisible act of the mind.

Here one may note the absolute necessity of what has been established if one will allow me for a moment to consider the moral end-goal’s ability to be accomplished as something that has been established. Here it is not a wish, or a hope, or the pondering and considering of reasons for and against, or a free decision to assume something the opposite of which one also takes to be possible. That assumption is absolutely necessary under the presupposition of the decision to obey the law residing in one’s inner self. It is immediately contained in this decision. It is itself this decision.

Then note the order of the train of thought. Reality is not inferred from possibility, but the reverse. The saying is not “I should because I can” but rather “I can because I should.” That I should do something, and what I should do, is the first, most immediate thing. This requires no further explanation, justification, or authorization; it is known on its own and is true on its own. It is not grounded by another truth or determined by another one; instead, on the contrary, every other truth is determined by this one. This series of thoughts has very frequently been overlooked. Whoever says “I must first know whether or not I can do something, before I can judge whether or not I should do it” either abolishes the primacy of the moral law, and thereby the moral law itself, if he is judging in a practical fashion, or completely misconstrues the original course of reason if he is judging in a speculative fashion.

<353> I must simply intend the goal of morality; accomplishing it is possible; it is possible through me. This means, according to a simple analysis, that each of the actions I should perform and my state of affairs, which conditions those actions, serve as the means to my intended goal. My entire existence, the existence of every moral being, and the sensible world (as our communal arena) henceforth maintain a relation to morality; and an entirely new order steps forward, of which the sensible world with all its immanent laws is only the quiescent foundation. That world proceeds calmly on its course, in accordance with its eternal laws, in order to fashion a sphere for freedom; however, it does not have the least influence on morality or immorality, not the slightest power over a free being. Self-sufficient and independent, this latter being soars over all of nature. That the goal of reason be realized—this can only be attained through the efficacy of a free being; however, it is also quite certainly attained in that way as a consequence of a higher law. Right action is possible, and every situation is taken into account by that higher law; a

moral act inevitably succeeds as a consequence of that very arrangement, and an immoral one inevitably fails. The entire world has received a completely altered appearance for us.

This change in appearance will light up all the more clearly when we elevate ourselves to the transcendental viewpoint. The world, as transcendental theory states, is nothing but the appearance of our own inner acting (as mere intellect) as it is manifested sensibly in accordance with the comprehensible laws of reason and within the incomprehensible limits in which we happen to be confined. Nobody is to be blamed if he is made uneasy by the complete disappearance of the ground out from under him. Those limits, as accords with their origin, are indeed incomprehensible; but what bothers you about this?—says practical philosophy; the *meaning* of those limits is the clearest, most certain that there is; they are your determinate place in the moral order of things. What you perceive as a consequence of them has reality, the only reality that concerns you and that there is for you. It is the continual interpretation of the command of duty, the living expression of *what* you should do simply because you should do it. Our world is the sensibly manifested material of our duty. This is what is actually real in things, the true basic element of all appearance. The compulsion with which the belief in the reality of the world forces itself on us is a moral compulsion, the only compulsion that is possible for a free being. No one can give up his moral vocation to such an extent (apart from annihilation) that it does not, within these limits, at least preserve him for greater refinement in the future. Therefore, regarded as the result of a <354> moral world-order, the principle of this belief in the reality of the sensible world can indeed be called revelation. It is our duty that is revealed in it.

This is the true faith. This moral order is what we are assuming to be *divine*. It is constituted by right action.²⁴ This is the only possible confession of faith: joyfully and calmly performing what duty commands at any time, without doubting and without quibbling about the consequences. In this way the divine becomes living and real to us. Each of our actions is performed in the presupposition of the divine, and only in it are all of the consequences of those actions kept in store.

True atheism, genuine unbelief, and godlessness consist of quibbling about the consequences of one's actions, in not being willing to obey the voice of one's conscience until one believes oneself to have foreseen a good outcome, thereby elevating one's own counsel above God's counsel and making oneself into God. Whoever is willing to do evil so that good comes out of it is a godless person. In a moral world-governance nothing good can result from evil; and as certainly as you believe in a moral world-governance, it is impossible for you to think that good can result from evil. You may not lie, even if the world should crumble into ruins as a result. But this is only a figure of speech. If you were able to believe in earnest that it would crumble, then at the very least your being would be absolutely contradictory and self-annihilating. But you just do not believe this. Neither can

²⁴ In other words, the relation between the divine and man is created through moral activity.

you nor may you believe it. You know that certainly no reckoning is made for a lie in the plan of the world's preservation.

The faith that has just been derived, however, is faith entirely and completely. That living and active moral order is itself God; we require no other God and can grasp no other. There is no ground in reason from which one can proceed and, by means of an inference from that which is grounded to its ground, assume some separate being as the cause of that which is grounded. Consequently, original understanding certainly does not make this inference and knows no such separate being. Only a philosophy that misunderstands itself makes this inference. Is, then, that order something accidental that could exist or not, could be *what* it is or also be otherwise, so that you would first have to explain its existence and its constitution by appealing to a ground and then would have to legitimate faith in this order by producing this ground? If you will no longer listen to the demands of a worthless system, but will instead interrogate your own inner self, then you will find that this world-order <355> is what is absolutely fundamental in all objective cognition, just as your freedom and moral vocation is what is absolutely fundamental in all subjective cognition. You will find that all other objective cognition must be grounded and determined by it, but that it simply cannot be determined by anything else, because there is nothing beyond it. You cannot attempt that explanation at all without doing harm to the status of that assumption within yourself and making it precarious. Its status is that it is absolutely certain on its own and tolerates no sophistry. You make it dependent upon sophistry.

And this sophistry, what does it achieve for you? Once you have made immediate conviction precarious, by what means do then you steady it? Oh, your faith is in a difficult position if you can profess it only as long as you affirm this ground that you erect, and if you must let it collapse when the ground for it collapses!

For even if one were willing to permit you to make that inference and by means of it to assume a separate being as the cause of that moral world-order, what have you then actually assumed? This being is supposed to be distinct from you and the world. It is supposed to be active in the world by means of concepts. Consequently, it is supposed to be able to have concepts, to possess personality and consciousness. What, then, do you denote as personality and consciousness? Perhaps what you have found within yourselves, have gotten to know about yourselves, and have labeled with these names? However, the least attention to your construction of these concepts can teach you that you simply do not and cannot think of personality and consciousness without limitation and finitude. Consequently, by attributing these predicates to this being you make it into something finite, into a being similar to yourselves; and you have not thought of God, as you wished, but rather you have only multiplied yourselves in your thinking. You can just as scarcely explain this moral world-order by appealing to this being as you can explain it by appealing to yourselves. It remains, as before, unexplained and absolute; and in using such words you have in fact not been thinking at all but rather have merely vibrated the air with an empty sound. You could have easily foreseen that you would fare this

way. You are finite. How could that which is finite encompass and comprehend the infinite?

Therefore, faith adheres to the immediately given and stands unshakably firm. If it is made dependent on the concept, it becomes precarious, for the concept is impossible and full of contradictions.

It is therefore a misunderstanding to say that it is doubtful whether a God exists or <356> not. It is not doubtful at all but rather the most certain thing that there is. Indeed, it is the ground of all other certainty, the single absolutely valid objective fact: that there is a moral world-order, that a determinate place in this order is assigned to every rational individual and his work is taken into account; that the destiny of each individual, insofar as it is not caused, so to speak, by his own conduct, is a result of this plan; that without this plan no hair falls from his head and within his sphere of activity no sparrow falls from a roof; that each truly good action succeeds and each truly evil one fails; and that for those who rightly love only the good, all things must conduce to the best.²⁵ Moreover, it can just as scarcely remain doubtful, to one who reflects for only a moment and is willing to admit honestly to himself the result of this reflection, that the concept of God as a separate substance is impossible and contradictory; it is permissible to say this openly and to quash the babble of the schools, so that the true religion of joyous right action may arise.

Two excellent poets have already inimitably expressed this confession of faith that comes from the intelligent and good person. The first has one of his characters converse as follows:

... who may say,
"I believe in God"?

Who may name Him (seek concepts and words for Him)

And confess,
"I believe in Him"?

Who can feel
And then dare

To say, "I do not believe in Him"? <357>

Embracing all (that is, after one has first apprehended Him with the moral sense and not, so to speak, by means of theoretical speculation, and after one already regards the world as an arena for moral beings)

Sustaining all,
Does He not embrace and sustain

²⁵ The first allusion is to the biblical passage: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father? But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Matthew 10: 29–30); and the second is to the biblical passage: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8: 28).

You, me, Himself?
 Do not the heavens vault above?
 Does not the earth lie fast below?
 And do not the eternal stars, kindly
 Twinkling, rise above?
 Do I not look you in the eye,
 And does not everything press
 Upon your head and heart,
 And move in eternal mystery,
 Invisibly visible, beside you?
 Fill your heart with it, as great as it is,
 And when you, wholly in this feeling, are blessed,
 Then call it what you will,
 Call it Fortune! Heart! Love! God!
 I have no name
 For it. Feeling is all,
 Names but noise and smoke
 Clouding over celestial ardor.²⁶

And the second sings:

... a holy *will* lives,
 As the human one wavers.
 High above time and space there stirs,
 Alive, the highest *thought*.
 And although everything whirls round in eternal change,
 It endures through change as a tranquil spirit.²⁷

²⁶ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: Ein Trauerspiel* (Leipzig: 1790), pp. 137–39. The parenthetical remarks and the omission (indicated by ellipses) are Fichte's.

²⁷ Friedrich von Schiller, "Worte des Glaubens," ["Words of Faith"] in *Musen-Almanach für das Jahr 1798* (Tübingen: 1798), pp. 221–22. The omission (indicated by ellipses) and emphases are Fichte's.

Endnote

* One would then have to ask for the ground of the I itself. Among the admittedly initial questions addressed to the *Wissenschaftslehre*, this one alone, however, was left to the latest Göttingen metaphysician, who actually raises it in his review of the *Wissenschaftslehre* in the *Göttingische Gelehrten Anzeigen*. The sort of people that one gets to deal with when one occupies oneself with philosophy in our philosophical century! Can the I explain itself (or even wish to explain itself) without going outside of itself and ceasing to be an I? That for which an explanation can even be sought is certainly not the pure (absolutely free and self-sufficient) I, for *every explanation creates dependency*.

The objection of the same reviewer, that the *Wissenschaftslehre* has not *demonstrated* its *fundamental principle* — i.e., that it asserts its fundamental principle — is of the same sort and issues from the same spirit. If the principle from which it proceeds could be proven, then for that very reason that principle would not be the fundamental principle. Instead, the highest principle from which this principle had been proven would be the fundamental principle, and we would thus proceed from this principle. Every proof presupposes something that is absolutely unprovable. That from which the *Wissenschaftslehre* proceeds cannot be comprehended or communicated by means of concepts; instead, it can only be immediately intuited. The *Wissenschaftslehre* necessarily remains groundless and merely formal for him who does not possess this intuition, and this system simply cannot get anywhere with him. This frank admission is not being offered here for the first time. But it is now customarily the case that, after one has issued a general reminder, one must still communicate it to every new opponent individually; and one is not supposed to become annoyed by this in the least. I will hereby have discharged, in all friendliness, my duty to this opponent. His *πρῶτον ψεῦδος* [first mistake] is this: it has not yet become adequately clear to him that, if truth is to exist at all, and if indirect truth (truth mediated by inference) in particular is to exist, then there must be something that is *immediately* true. As soon as he has realized this, let him search for this immediate truth until he finds it. Only then will he be capable of judging the system of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, for only then will he understand it. In spite of his repeated assurances, this has not been the case up to now, as perhaps will come to seem probable to him as he coolly considers the preceding reminders. {Editor's Comment: Fichte is referring to criticism of the *Wissenschaftslehre* written by Friedrich Bouterwek (1766–1828) in Bouterwek's review of K. L. Reinhold's *Vermischte Schriften* that appeared in the *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen*, no. 194, 7 December 1797: pp. 1929–34. The University of Göttingen was the center of orthodox Kantianism. Many negative reviews of Fichte's works were published through the *Göttingische Anzeigen*, which served as a mouthpiece of the Kantians within the university. Bouterwek was a historian, philologist, and novelist. He defended Fichte during the atheism dispute (despite his distaste for the *Wissenschaftslehre*).}

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Chapter 2

F. K. Forberg: “Development of the Concept of Religion”

Commentary

In 1798, the first issue of *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten* featured “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance” by J. G. Fichte and “Development of the Concept of Religion,” by F. K. Forberg.¹ Forberg was a former theological student, and current rector of a lyceum in Saalfeld, who had studied with Ernst Platner in Leipzig and with K. L. Reinhold in Jena.² Prior to 1797, he had been a *Dozent* at the University of Jena.³ Although purportedly a transcendental idealist, Forberg was more a theoretical skeptic and practical cynic than Immanuel Kant, Reinhold, or Fichte.⁴ He cannot be accurately described as a Fichtean despite being portrayed as Fichte’s protégé during the atheism dispute. In philosophical position and tone, Forberg resembles early representatives of enlightenment, such as Voltaire and Diderot.⁵

Fichte had not been enthusiastic about publishing “Development of the Concept of Religion” in his *Philosophisches Journal*.⁶ A mixture of reflexive suspicion and grudging admiration typified Fichte and Forberg’s relationship.⁷

¹ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 21–29 (GA, I, 5, pp. 347–57) and “Development of the Concept of Religion,” pp. 37–47 (SFA, pp. 37–58). Forberg’s “Entwicklung des Begriffs der Religion” [“Development of the Concept of Religion”] was first published in the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten* Vol. VIII, No. 1, (Jena/Leipzig: Gabler, 1798), pp. 21–46. For details regarding other versions and printings of Forberg’s essay, see the remarks by the editors of GA (GA, I, 5, p. 221). Friedrich Karl Forberg (1770–1848).

² Ernst Platner (1744–1818) was professor of physiology, medicine and philosophy at the University of Leipzig and Karl Leonard Reinhold (1757–1823) was Fichte’s predecessor at the University of Jena.

³ Forberg taught at the University of Jena as a *Dozent*, or type of adjunct lecturer, from 1792 until 1796. He moved to Saalfeld in 1797.

⁴ Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). Fichte, indeed, believed that Forberg’s skepticism was based in dogmatic tendencies. See Fichte’s “Postscript to the Preceding Article and Preface to the Following One,” IWL, p. 139 (GA, I, 4, p. 464).

⁵ François-Marie Arouet “Voltaire” (1694–1778) and Denis Diderot (1713–1784) were both prolific and outspoken representatives of the French enlightenment.

⁶ GA, III, 3, p. 328.

⁷ This did not prevent Fichte from doggedly asserting Forberg’s moral and juridical innocence during the atheism dispute. Likewise, it did not prevent Forberg from readily acknowledging Fichte’s humor in the lecture hall or his sovereignty in the speculative

Forberg enjoyed playing gadfly on Fichte's mount: He specifically wrote a series of "Letters on the Newest Philosophy" as a challenge to Fichte's "pitch-black" and "chimerical" *Wissenschaftslehre*.⁸ Fichte viewed the self-styled critical philosopher from Saalfeld with trepidation: He saw Forberg as a quick-witted and somewhat unscrupulous dilettante rather than as a sincere scholar.⁹ Fichte's assessment was mostly correct: Forberg's philosophical corpus is neither copious nor profound, and he was probably most noted by his colleagues for his role in the atheism dispute.¹⁰

Whether Fichte believed Forberg sincere or not, and whether he found himself enthusiastic or not, he did publish Forberg's "Development of the Concept of Religion." Despite superficial similarities, Fichte's and Forberg's accounts of religion differ sharply. Whereas Fichte claims that religious belief in a moral world order is not a pious dream but rather the incontestable ground of all certainty, Forberg maintains that religious belief consists in the *wish* that "the good in the world may maintain the upper hand over the evil," or in the *hope* that God, or a moral world-sovereign, exists.¹¹ Moreover, he asserts that we need not *truly believe* in a moral world order but need only "*act as if we believe*" in God.¹²

For Forberg, there are different types of belief that rest on different grounds. *Theoretical* belief, or scientific *knowledge*, depends on experience or speculation.¹³ *Practical* belief, or moral *faith*, depends on conscience.¹⁴ Experience speaks against the probability that the world is morally governed, because past and present observation indicate a preponderance of iniquity rather than righteousness

realm. For a brief description of Fichte and Forberg's interactions, see FG, I, pp. 236 and 475.

⁸ "Briefe über die neueste Philosophie" ["Letters on the Newest Philosophy"] *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten*, Vol. VI, No. 1 (1797), pp. 44–88 and Vol. VII, No. 4, (1797), pp. 259–72 and *Fragmente aus meinen Papieren* [*Fragments from My Papers*] (Jena: 1796), pp. 71–78. Fichte responded to Forberg's challenge, which was also directed at F. W. J. Schelling (1775–1854), in his *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre*: "Second Introduction," IWL, pp. 36–105 (GA, I, 4, pp. 209–68).

⁹ GA, III, 3, p. 111.

¹⁰ Besides his involvement with the atheism dispute, Forberg is probably best known today for his *Fragmente aus meinen Papieren* (Jena: 1796), which recounts the intellectual hotbed that was Jena, and his 1824 commentary, *De figuris Veneris*, on the poem *Hermaphroditus* by Antonio "Il Panormita" Beccadelli (1394–1471), which was translated into English by Julian Smithson as *Manual of Classical Erotology* (Manchester: 1884).

¹¹ "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," pp. 22 and 24–25 (GA, I, 5, p. 348 and 351–52) and "Development of the Concept of Religion," pp. 39 and 42–43 (SFA, pp. 42 and 49).

¹² "Concept of Religion," pp. 43–44 (SFA, p. 51).

¹³ "Concept of Religion," pp. 37, 39, and 43 (SFA, pp. 37–38, 42, and 50).

¹⁴ Ibid.

in the world.¹⁵ Speculation offers neither contingent nor necessary proof of a moral world order, because the inductive and deductive proofs of God's existence are fallacious.¹⁶ "Religion is neither a product of experience nor a discovery of speculation, but rather merely and only the fruit of a morally good heart."¹⁷

Forberg says that the good person *wishes* for righteousness to prevail over wickedness and thus *aspires* to promote goodness by *acting* virtuously. Although the ultimate success or possibility of this moral goal cannot be proven, it cannot be disproven, and thus, the good person also has ground to *hope* that a moral order, or kingdom of God, will appear on earth.¹⁸ Indeed, the morally good person is duty-bound to pursue this aspiration and to entertain this hope *until* the impossibility of a moral world order can be incontrovertibly demonstrated *and then*, not even a good person is obliged to believe the impossible.¹⁹

According to Forberg, *thinking* morally requires that we *act* as if we possess certain conviction of our belief, but *acting* morally does not require that we *think* our belief possesses certain conviction.²⁰ For Forberg, the theoretical realm of knowledge is not merely distinct from the practical realm of belief: Knowledge and faith share no common ground.²¹ Religious belief affects practical activity exclusively, neither determining nor constraining theoretical activity. Theoretical activity affects religious belief not at all, because practical activity and belief begin when theoretical activity reaches its inherent limit. The goal of morality—the universal rule of good over evil—is just an ideal, or an idea created by morally good people. When philosophizing, "one can behave as one wishes," leaving the possibility of this goal "undecided," but when acting, one should persevere as if one has "decided on its possibility."²²

Forberg admits to being a theoretical agnostic, but he claims that theoretical unbelief and practical belief, or religion, can coincide as readily as practical unbelief and theoretical belief, or superstition.²³ "In real life, where something ought to be done," one acts according to moral values of "right and wrong" in hope that fate (or God, or the moral world order) will take up the slack without

¹⁵ "Concept of Religion," pp. 37–38 (SFA, p. 39).

¹⁶ Forberg examines many of the traditional arguments for God's existence, such as the ontological proof, the proof from contingency, and the teleological proof. He rejects them using some of the traditional and some of the critical replies, such as "existence is not a predicate," "the existence of a necessary being precludes contingency," "man imposes intelligent design on the world," "a rational creator is not necessarily God," and "the problem of evil" ("Concept of Religion," pp. 37–39 [SFA, pp. 39–42]).

¹⁷ "Concept of Religion," p. 39 (SFA, pp. 41–2).

¹⁸ "Concept of Religion," p. 39 (SFA, p. 50).

¹⁹ "Concept of Religion," pp. 43–46 (SFA, pp. 50–3 and 55).

²⁰ "Concept of Religion," pp. 42–44 (SFA, pp. 49–51).

²¹ "Concept of Religion," pp. 44–45 (SFA, pp. 51–3).

²² "Concept of Religion," pp. 44 and 43 (SFA, pp. 51 and 50).

²³ "Concept of Religion," p. 46 (SFA, p. 56).

vexing oneself with speculative questions of “truth and error.”²⁴ “In the forum of speculative reason,” there remain, Forberg says, certain vexing theoretical questions that indicate whether one has mastered a philosophy.²⁵ If one has fully comprehended a philosophy, then one must answer those questions from within that theory rather than according to the tenets of some other “system of which it is already very doubtful whether it has given more assistance to science or to ignorance.”²⁶ Thus, speaking from within his own interpretation of the critical philosophy, Forberg answers some of these vexing theoretical questions about religion with characteristic sarcasm.²⁷ *Is there a moral world order?* It “remains uncertain.”²⁸ *Is the goal of morality possible?* It is “improbable.”²⁹ *Is a religion of truth and good any more justified than a religion of deceit and evil?* “The one has no more and no less going for it than the other.”³⁰

Although Fichte and Forberg are both transcendental idealists, the two philosophers are clearly at odds about both philosophy and religion.³¹ Forberg’s description of religious belief as a duty and a wish simply contradicts Fichte’s interpretation of duty, belief, and reason.³² Fichte’s concept of duty entails believing; and his concept of reason precludes wishing.³³ In the rational realms of theory, morality, and religion, one may not behave as one desires but rather as one must: “Whatever is grounded in reason is absolutely necessary; and whatever is not necessary is precisely on that account contrary to reason.”³⁴ Fichte and Forberg regard the conceptual priority of proofs and beliefs quite differently. Forberg

²⁴ “Concept of Religion,” p. 44 (SFA, p. 52).

²⁵ “Concept of Religion,” pp. 44–45 (SFA, pp. 51 and 54).

²⁶ “Concept of Religion,” p. 45 (SFA, pp. 53–54). Forberg leaves the question open as to whether the dubious other system he has in mind is *Wissenschaftslehre* or superstition, and indeed, as to whether *Wissenschaftslehre* and superstition are one and the same dubious theory.

²⁷ “Concept of Religion,” pp. 45–47 (SFA, pp. 54–58).

²⁸ “Concept of Religion,” p. 45 (SFA, p. 54).

²⁹ “Concept of Religion,” p. 46 (SFA, p. 56).

³⁰ “Concept of Religion,” p. 46 (SFA, p. 57).

³¹ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” “Concept of Religion,” p. 21 (GA, I, 5, p. 347). Fichte struggles to explain that Forberg’s claims are essentially compatible with his own (*Juridical Defense*, pp. 175–76 [GA, I, 6, pp. 47–9 and 51–2]). For a discussion of the distinctions between Fichte and Forberg, see Hans Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of “As If,”* trans. C. K. Ogden (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1924), pp. 319–27.

³² “Concept of Religion,” pp. 44–45 (SFA, pp. 51–3).

³³ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 22–25 (GA, I, 5, pp. 348–49 and 352). Compare to Forberg, “Concept of Religion,” pp. 39 and 44–45 (SFA, pp. 46 and 50).

³⁴ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” p. 22 (GA, I, 5, p. 348). Compare to Forberg, “Concept of Religion,” pp. 43–44 (SFA, p. 51).

understands the so-called moral proof of religion as an argumentative leap over a gap between rational theory and moral practice whereas Fichte understands it as a genetic explanation of the relation between belief and reason as a whole.³⁵ According to Fichte, beliefs ground proofs: He rejects traditional proofs for religion because they base the immediate certainty of belief in a supersensible world order on mediate arguments and sensible contingencies.³⁶

Forberg and Fichte have very distinct views of the relation between theoretical and practical reason as well as very distinct views of the relation between philosophy and life. For Forberg, theoretical belief, or knowledge, and practical belief, or faith, are *entirely separate* whereas, for Fichte, rational faith is the *foundation* of practical and theoretical knowledge, and thus, belief guides and constrains philosophy.³⁷ Likewise, for Fichte, the possibility of our moral goal is not left undecided at the standpoint of philosophy but rather is already decided at the standpoint of life. In contrast to Forberg, Fichte maintains that there are no vexing questions for the transcendental idealist: There is a moral world order; The goal of morality is necessary; And the religion of truth and good is the sole rational religion.³⁸ In answer to Forberg's final vexing question, Fichte's likely response is that *Forberg's notion* of practical belief is more a playful than an earnest philosophical concept and that Forberg is less an earnest than a playful philosopher.³⁹

Sincerity and duplicity aside, Fichte in "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance" and Forberg in "Development of the Concept of Religion" express positions guaranteed to offend both the orthodox Christians and the *Popularphilosophen*. Fichte simply denies too many aspects of Lutheran, Evangelical Christian, and Catholic dogma to avoid injuring the defenders of orthodoxy. Forberg adds insult by seeming to mock both church creed and its attendant sentiments. Moreover, Fichte and Forberg prove equally provocative to representatives of the common sense school of philosophy insofar as they

³⁵ "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," pp. 21–22 (GA, I, 5, p. 349) and J. G. Fichte: "Concluding Remark by the Editor," pp. 276–78 (GA, I, 6, pp. 411–13).

³⁶ J. G. Fichte: "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," pp. 23–24 (GA, I, 5, pp. 349–51). Compare to Forberg, "Concept of Religion," pp. 37–39 (SFA, pp. 46, 50, and 39–42).

³⁷ "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," pp. 24–25 (GA, I, 5, pp. 351–52). Compare to Forberg, "Concept of Religion," pp. 43–44 (SFA, pp. 51–3).

³⁸ "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," pp. 26–28 (GA, I, 5, pp. 354–6).

³⁹ "And, finally, *is not the concept of a practical belief more a playful concept than an earnest philosophical one?* The answer to this vexing question one properly relinquishes to the reader who is himself favorably inclined to answer it, and one thereby simultaneously relinquishes to the reader the judgment as to whether the author of the present essay in the end only wanted to play with him!" "Concept of Religion," p. 47 (SFA, p. 58).

stress the limits of reason, including its inability to demonstrate basic tenets of natural religion. Their emphases on faith—however different—must seem to many *Aufklärer*, including the *Popularphilosophen*, as a step backwards into an irrational and anti-scientific obscurantism.

Text: "Development of the Concept of Religion"

<SFA, p. 37>

Religion is nothing other than a practical faith in a moral world-governance, or, to express the same concept in a familiar, hallowed idiom, a living faith in the kingdom of God that will appear on earth.

Whoever believes in a moral world-governance, and indeed believes practically, has religion, and only he has religion.

It is clear from the words themselves what a moral world-governance is. If things happen in the world so that the ultimate success of the good is to be expected, then there is a moral world-governance. If, on the contrary, fate is unconcerned about virtue and vice, then there is no moral world-governance. The sublime spirit who governs the world in accordance with moral laws is the *deity*. This <38> is the only concept of God that religion needs; or, rather, it is the only concept of God by means of which religion itself first becomes possible. The speculative concepts of God as the most real, infinite, absolutely necessary being are foreign to religion or at least of no consequence to it. Religion can, if it discovers them, do something practical with them, but it can also dispense with them without harm if it does not discover them. Religion can co-exist just as well with polytheism as with monotheism, just as well with anthropomorphism as with spiritualism. If only morality remains the rule of the world-governance, then it is otherwise all the same whether one believes in a monarchical or aristocratic world-constitution; and if the heavenly beings that the ancients thought to be gods had only acted in a more moral fashion, then from the side of the heart there would also have been no objection to raise against them. Moreover, speculation that knows its limits would have no objection to raise against them, and art would doubtless rather deplore their absence.

There is a moral world-governance and a deity who governs the world in accordance with moral laws. Whoever believes this has religion.

There rightly arises the question: *on what is this faith founded?*

There are *three* sources from which we must in the end draw all of our conviction. They are *experience*, *speculation*, and *conscience*. One of them will thus have to be the source of religion.

"We learn from *experience* that there is a moral world-governance." This would be as good as saying: in experience, we see before our eyes that <39> in the end the good succeed and the evil fail. In experience, however, it is precisely this that we do *not* see before our eyes, and it has been the ancient complaint of all righteous people from time immemorial that evil so often triumphs over good. Rather the opposite can be inferred from experience: namely, that the world is *not* governed in a moral fashion; or at least that an evil genius struggles with a good one for world supremacy, and now and then the good one, but usually the evil one, maintains the upper hand. Whoever looks for the deity outside of himself in the course of things will never find Him. He will meet with "the work of the devil" on

all sides, but only rarely, and always shyly and doubtfully, will he be able to say: “Here is God’s hand!”

Perhaps *speculation* is more successful in finding a deity, since it is not experience! If this were the case, there would have to be certain principles of *theoretical* reason that would allow the existence of a moral world-sovereign to be inferred with certainty. Several of these have been laid down. The most noteworthy of them have been the following: the mere concept of a most perfect being already includes the existence of that being; that which is contingent presupposes something that is absolutely necessary; order is not possible without an ordering mind. But not a single one of all of these alleged principles of theoretical reason is found upon closer inspection to be reliable. Each contains in itself an entirely arbitrary and unprovable presupposition, which one only needs to uncover in order to dispel any illusions immediately. The mere concept of a most perfect being does *not* include the existence of that being, <40> for the concept of a thing does not include the existence of that thing. Only in intuition is there existence, and only if intuition is added to the concept are concept and existence united. Not even the concept of a most perfect being as the sum of all realities includes existence. For existence is not a reality, and not a quality whatsoever. Were it a quality, then in any event one would have to be able to answer the question *What is this?* with “It is a thing that is”—as, doubtless, no reasonable person will answer in earnest.

“That which is contingent presupposes something that is absolutely necessary.” Others have said this and from it have inferred the existence of a deity. What, however, is contingent? Is it something whose non-existence can be imagined? Then in the entire realm of human understanding there is no concept for what is absolutely necessary, for nowhere is there to be found a thing whose non-existence cannot be imagined at once. Is, then, what did not always exist but came into being at some time, only this contingent? Then, of course, it presupposes something by means of which it came into being, a cause that gave it its existence. Only why did this cause not give it its existence sooner if it (as absolutely necessary) was always extant? Could it not do so? But what made the obstacles that stood in its way disappear just now? Did it not will this? And what happened to change its will? Therefore, what is absolutely necessary is transformed at close range into something contingent, and at the limit of all questioning we see ourselves unavoidably driven beyond this limit.

“Order,” say still others, “is not possible without an ordering <41> mind.” And why not? Because we know no other principle of order except the understanding? But since when has the boundary of our knowledge become the boundary of the possible? And where, then, in the world is order to be found so unambiguously that the existence of a deity can be inferred with certainty? In what is physical? But a skilled architect is still by no means a moral world-sovereign! A great artist is far from being God! In what is moral? But would not a panegyric on the moral order of a world “that lies in evil” be a satire on the deity rather than a demonstration of

its existence?⁴⁰ Could the world possibly look worse than it does, could it possibly carry on more terribly than it does if an evil, if a hostile, if a malevolent being dominated the world or at least shared it with a good genius? Would a defense of Satan on account of his allowing good possibly fail less thoroughly than a defense of God on account of His allowing evil has heretofore failed? And would not the inference from the existence of a wicked world to the existence of a holy God at the very least be very unusual, very unnatural?

If, accordingly, neither experience nor speculation can discover the deity, nothing remains to us except to ground a religion upon the dictums of *conscience*. And so it is in fact. Religion is neither a product of experience <42> nor a discovery of speculation, but rather merely and only the fruit of a morally good heart. The deity is inaccessible to experience and speculation; only the good person has the privilege of knowing Him; only a pure heart may see the deity—and the maxim of a great wise man: "Blessed are those who are pure of heart, for they shall see God," first receives its true and deep and holy meaning in the present sequence of thoughts!⁴¹

The question now arises of how and in what way religion arises in the heart, and only in the heart, of a morally good person.

To say it briefly: religion arises solely from the *wish of a good heart that the good in the world may maintain the upper hand over the evil in the world*. No wish of this kind is present in an evil heart. Therefore, something like religion cannot be asked of it at all. No human being, however, is so evil that he could wish in earnest that evil might in the end entirely drive the good from the face of the earth. This would not be the wish of a villain but rather of a Satan. Therefore, on earth there is indeed a religion of good people but not a religion of evil ones. Faith in the ultimate downfall of the good, faith in a kingdom of Satan on earth would be a hellish religion; however, it is not this but only irreligion that is present in the most wicked villain.

I imagine the manner in which religion arises in a good heart is more or less as follows. It is a well known fact that everyone wishes, with respect to what he himself takes an interest in, that <43> everyone else might also take an interest in it; that what he recognizes as true and proper for himself, everyone else might also recognize as true and proper. This wish is deeply grounded in human nature and is not to be stamped out by anything. On the contrary, only too often it turns into

⁴⁰ Kant begins Book One of *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* with the statement "That 'the world lieth in evil' is a plaint as old as history, old even as the older art, poetry; indeed, as old as that oldest of all fictions, the religion of priest-craft" (*Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, (trans.) Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), p. 15). Kant and Forberg are alluding to the biblical passage "And we know that we are of God and that the whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 John 5: 19).

⁴¹ Forberg is paraphrasing the biblical passage: "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matthew 5: 8).

the strongest passion. Without this wish deeply grounded in the recesses of human nature, it would have to be completely indifferent to us whether others agree with our opinion or whether they reject it. Instead, this is by no means indifferent to us; but, on the contrary, the former causes us profound pleasure, the latter bitter disappointment. The idea of the future possible agreement of all people in all *judgments* hovers incessantly before the eyes of every thinking person. Everyone wishes that his convictions might become dominant and universally accepted. The moment in which a universal agreement of all people in all judgments took place would be the *golden age of thinkers*. This would be the moment in which all error would have disappeared from the face of the earth and nothing but truth would be found in every mind. Truth would have completely defeated error, and the *kingdom of truth* would have appeared on earth! It is the final goal of all thinking people—the final goal wherefore they communicate their thoughts to one another, wherefore they challenge and correct each other—to hasten, to produce (as much as it is in their power) that moment, so that the kingdom of truth may soon appear on earth. All thinking minds, as a result of this common final goal, stand together in a certain union, in a certain community. <44> This union, in which all thinking people involuntarily and unintentionally stand (and even often without knowing for what reason), and whose goal it is, little by little, to make all people agree in all judgments and to hasten the advent of the kingdom of truth on earth—this union is the *republic of scholars* in which reason is the leader and every thinking person a citizen. In the republic of scholars only a single article of faith holds good, and it reads: “Believe that the kingdom of truth will appear on earth, and only do all that you can in your situation, through communication and instruction, through examining and testing, so that it comes soon, and otherwise be unconcerned about the outcome; only *strive* for the kingdom of truth, then the rest, namely the outcome, will surely fall to you of itself!” The kingdom of truth, however, is an *ideal*. For, given the infinite diversity of capacities with which nature seems to have pleased itself so much, it is never to be expected that an agreement of all people in all judgments will ever occur. The kingdom of truth will thus certainly never arrive; and the final goal of the republic of scholars, to all appearance, will not be reached for eternity. Nevertheless, the indestructible interest in truth, which is in the breast of every thinking person, will for eternity demand opposing error with all one’s strength and spreading truth from all sides, that is, acting just *as if* error could entirely die out and the dominance of truth were to be expected.⁴² And precisely this is the character of a <45> nature that, like the human one, is determined to approach ideals *in infinitum*.

Just as the idea of a future possible agreement of all people in all judgments hovers incessantly before the eyes of all thinking people, there also hovers before the eyes of all morally good people the idea of a universal agreement about the *good*, the idea of a universal dissemination of justice and goodwill. Every well-

⁴² Forberg is alluding to the Kantian claim that a rational being must live “as if” the ideas of reason (such as God, freedom, and immortality) were factual.

meaning person, everyone to whom an interest in virtue is dear, wishes and must wish that he is not the only righteous person on earth, that everyone around him may pay homage to the good as he pays homage to it, that vice may little by little disappear from the face of the earth, and that a time may finally come in which only good people live peacefully and amicably alongside one another on the earth. This moment, if it ever arose, would be the moment of a universal rule of good over evil; it would be the *golden age of the heart*, the *kingdom of right* on earth. It is the most fervent wish of every righteous person that this moment may one day come; and this must be the most fervent wish of every righteous person, as certainly as he is a righteous person, and as certainly as the interests of virtue cannot be indifferent to him who loves virtue. But this is no vain, no idle wish; on the contrary, it is his most earnest aspiration to promote the victory of good over evil, to drive evil, where possible, entirely off the earth, to stamp out abuses of every kind, and to hasten the arrival of the kingdom of justice and peace (which is the kingdom of God) on earth. <46> It is the final goal of all good people to bring it about that everywhere in the world things go right and that justice finally triumphs over injustice. Since all good people work in common towards this final goal, to that extent there arises a union of all good people for the attainment of this *one* final goal. Now this union of all good people for the common promotion of everything good is the *church*, and every righteous person—precisely because of his righteousness, but not only because of his righteousness—is a member of the church, a member of "the congregation of saints on earth." The goal of the church is that good shall rule over evil, that the kingdom of right shall appear on earth. In this church there is neither conflict nor schism. There is only the banner of righteousness around which all members of the church assemble. There is only *one* church, and all righteous people belong to this *one*. It is the only church that makes blessed, and no salvation is to be found outside of it. If there were more than one church, there would have to be two types of righteousness—and this is a conceptual contradiction, as everyone sees!

Therefore, it is the wish and aspiration of every righteous person to secure the supremacy of good over evil in the world and finally, where possible, to wipe evil from the face of the earth. All good people have the same wish and the same aspiration, and so there arises a union of all good people for a *single* final goal. This union is the church or "the congregation of saints on earth."

But there now justly arises the question: is this, then, <47> everywhere a possible final goal that good people intend to attain? They want to bring about the dominance of the good. They want to erect the kingdom of right on earth. Virtue shall become the most commonplace thing in the world, vice something unheard of. "Morality shall become custom." Is all of this even possible? Or is it not rather a bare and empty chimera? Can one hope that a golden age of justice and perpetual peace will ever appear on earth? Or should one rather fear the opposite, that the world, in the future and for eternity, will be "afloat on a sea of troubles" as before?

It is true: if the good person decided to pay less attention to the voice of his heart within himself than to the voice of experience around him, then he would quite soon be forced to give up his hope for better times and consequently at the same time would also abandon his aspiration to hasten the approach of those better times by every means in his power. As an individual, of course, he incessantly has his duty before his eyes and in his heart. As an individual, of course, he does everything in order that the wrong in the world decreases. But he looks around himself, and how few does he find who are inclined as he is? The crowd around him does exactly the opposite of everything that he does and—just because it is the crowd—with incomparably happier results! *He* sketches many a salutary plan for promoting the welfare of his brothers, for remedying abuses, for stamping out prejudices, for disseminating enlightened insights into all kinds of human affairs; but because of the evil of one person and because <48> of the stupidity of another, he often sees only that much more confusion, harm, and unhappiness emerge out of his plans! *He* wants to erase wrong from the earth, and yet “injustice is drunk like water” around him.⁴³ *He* strives so that the kingdom of God, that is, the kingdom of truth and right, will appear on earth; however, at the end of his lifetime he sees it as far away as ever. Human beings have not become better. Injustice is no less in vogue. The passions, indeed the wildest of them all, namely, lust for power and greed, ravage mankind just as shamelessly as before. The language of justice, honesty, and fidelity still sounds like foolishness to the ears of the world. The appearance of selflessness, integrity, and generosity is still a rare, admirable occurrence. The irresponsible barbarism of warfare still continues. Things that one finds punishable and shameful on a small scale and in private relationships are (in states) not only tolerated on a large scale, in public relationships, and in associations that claim to be established for the safeguarding of justice (and which for precisely this reason can be called holy), but even bring honor and fame! The morally good person sees all of this. Now what should *he*, the single individual, do in the face of an immoral world? Should he also stop resisting the tide of injustice? Should he henceforth rather let things go on in the world as they are, without exerting himself anymore and perhaps sacrificing himself for an idealistic goal that will never be attained? Should he retreat <49> and stop standing in front of the abyss, because in the end all that he does, all his struggling and suffering, is in vain; and because in the judgment of some, the world, reckoned against the ancient times of innocence, simplicity, and honesty, not only does not become better, but probably gets worse? Should the righteous person think this way, and should he act this way?

“*No*”—his good heart calls out to him with a loud voice—“you should do good and not get weary!”⁴⁴ Believe in virtue, believe that in the end it will be victorious!

⁴³ Forberg is alluding to the biblical passage “How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water” (Job 15:16).

⁴⁴ Forberg is alluding to the biblical passages: “And let us not be weary of well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Galatians 6: 9) and “But ye, brethren, be

Hope that, in the end, right will still securely retain the upper hand over wrong, good the upper hand over evil. Work as long as there is daylight to work, and let no opportunity pass to do the good that you can do; and bear in mind that a long night can come after you, a night in which no one will be able or want to do good, and in which the good that you have done will be the only star of hope for "the honest people in the land!"⁴⁵ Do what you can so that things in the world become better, brighter, and more enlightened, and nobler, more honest, more peaceful, and more just, and be unconcerned about the result! Believe that no good that you do or even only plan, be it ever so small and imperceptible and inconspicuous, goes missing in the irregular course of things! Believe that a plan, which, of course, is not visible to you at a glance, lies at the foundation of the course of things, a plan in which the ultimate success of the good is expected! Believe that the kingdom of God, the kingdom of truth and right, will appear on earth, and strive only for its coming! Believe that <50> everything depends upon your striving alone, and that a sublime genius reigns over fate, completes everything that you begin, and perhaps completes everything only after centuries! Believe that at every step you take for the sake of the good, though it seems to you ever so lost, it is reckoned from eternity in the plan of the deity that you live each of your days for eternity, and that it depends solely on you, unto eternity, to win or lose each day for what is best in the world! It is true, you cannot scientifically prove that any of this must be so, but enough, your heart says to you: you should act in this way, *as if* it were so, and if you act in this way, then you show precisely thereby that you have religion!"

This is the manner in which religion arises, and can only arise, in the heart of a good person. The good person *wishes* that the good may rule everywhere on earth, and he *feels himself bound* by his conscience to do all that he can in order to help bring about this end. That this end is possible he certainly *does not know*; that is, he cannot prove it. Yet he also cannot prove its impossibility. He therefore *believes* that the goal of the unchallenged dominance of the good is nevertheless a possible goal, that nevertheless a kingdom of God, as a kingdom of truth and right, can be established on earth. For this is what he wishes and wills. He can, if he speculates, leave it undecided whether this goal is possible or impossible; only when he acts must he proceed as if he had decided on its possibility. He must strive to approach this goal gradually. <51> If he intended to proceed as if it were indifferent to him whether things might unfold in the world justly or unjustly, then, because in the end it is impossible to make angels out of human beings, he would not intend to do the good that he can do and would not intend to prevent the evil that he can prevent. Therefore, he could not deny to himself that acting in accordance with the opposed maxim is evidence of a great and sublime way of thinking, but he

not weary in well doing." (2 Thessalonians 3: 13).

⁴⁵ Forberger is alluding to the biblical passage: "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work" (John 9: 4).

himself, because of his petty and cowardly maxim, would appear contemptible in his own eyes.

Religion is accordingly no indifferent matter that one can take up as one wishes. On the contrary, it is a *duty*. It is a duty to believe in an order of things in the world wherein one can expect the eventual success of all good plans, and wherein the effort to promote the good and to prevent evil is not absolutely in vain; or, which is the same thing, it is a duty to believe in a moral world-governance or in a God who rules the world in accordance with moral laws. Only this faith is by no means a duty insofar as it is *theoretical*, that is, idle, *speculation*, but rather only insofar as it is *practical*, that is, insofar as it is the *maxim* of real actions. In other words, it is *not a duty to believe* that a moral world-governance or God as the moral world-sovereign exists; instead, it is merely *a duty to act as if one believed it*. In moments of reflection or disputation one can behave as one wishes. One can declare oneself for theism or atheism to the extent that one thinks it possible to defend oneself in the forum of speculative reason, <52> for here we find not the language of religion but rather that of speculation, not the language of right and wrong but rather that of truth and error. Only in real life, where something ought to be done, is it a duty *not* to act as if one presupposed that it is already in vain to make much of a fuss over promoting good in the world, that one will not be able to swim against the tide, that the individual will accomplish nothing with the best will in the face of the crowd, that it is foolishness to want to transform a world full of clowns and rascals into a world full of angels, and that clever people are to be advised first of all to derive some benefit for themselves from this universal foolishness and are otherwise to let things continue as they are. In these maxims one would act contrary to one's own conscience. One would act as if in advance one knew with certainty of the failure of one's good plans, although one cannot know this with certainty. But it is just as possible that chance will promote our aims as that it will destroy them. Those maxims (the maxims of *irreligion*) are thus sins and contrary to duty. Before one's conscience no one can answer to a maxim other than that of doing good and preventing evil where one knows how and can do so (without letting oneself be perplexed by the concern that one does not have success within one's power, and without considering every good and fine and great notion as a pound entrusted to us by which we should profit); of working incessantly on spreading the true and the good in our sphere; and, if one feels the strength for it (strength, however, is a summons), of working on the reformation of the world in accordance with ideals. This is done in the hope that chance (or the <53> deity, understood as a power that is otherwise unknown to us) will clear all difficulties out of the way (even if we do not know immediately how and when), and in the hope that if we only perform our obligation, if we only strive with earnestness and eagerness for the kingdom of God, the rest—success—will surely come to us (or to our descendants) in its own time and of its own accord. These maxims are the maxims of religion, and religion is accordingly nothing but belief in the success of the good, just as irreligion, by contrast, is nothing but despairing of the good. Consequently, religion is by no means an expedient for human weakness. (It is this, of course, as soon as one

thinks of religious faith as a theoretical belief.) The power of the moral will, on the contrary, appears nowhere more splendidly and more sublimely than in the maxim of the religious person: *I will that things may get better, even though nature does not will this!* Irreligion is genuine and real spiritual weakness, but it is *self-imposed* weakness. Because no one can despair of the good from any insight (just as if one had glanced into the book of fate), it is really only laziness that shuns further efforts after a few unsuccessful attempts; and the supposed fruitlessness of these efforts is nothing but a pretext by means of which the lazy person tries to corrupt the moral judgment of others and then also that of his own conscience, but at least he never actually corrupts the latter.

There are *vexing questions* that must be submitted to oneself at the conclusion of a theory if one <54> wants to know whether or not one (a *one* that the author himself sometimes falls under) has properly adopted the principles of the theory. But one must answer these questions in the same style in which they are raised, and not in the style of a system of which it is already very doubtful whether it has given more assistance to science or to ignorance.

The vexing questions of the kind that relate to religion are the following:

Does God exist? Answer: it is and remains uncertain. (For this question is merely raised out of speculative curiosity, and it serves the curious person quite right if he is sometimes rebuffed.)

Can everyone be expected to believe in God? Answer: no. (For the question undoubtedly takes the concept of belief in a theoretical sense, for a particular way of taking something to be true, and this theoretical sense is also the only one that acknowledges common linguistic usage and that philosophers should perhaps not have abandoned.)

Is religion a conviction of the understanding or a maxim of the will? Answer: it is not a conviction of the understanding but rather a maxim of the will. (Whatever is present here on account of a conviction of the understanding is superstition.)

How does the religious person act? Answer: he never tires of promoting the cause of the true and the good in the world, even though his plans fail ever so often; and his religion consists precisely in the fact that he never tires and that he never despairs of the good. There is nowhere <55> a religion that is justified before reason except this one.

Can religion be expected of everyone? Answer: without a doubt, just as everyone can be expected to act scrupulously; and irreligion (despairing of the good without adequate grounds) is unscrupulousness.

How many articles of faith are there in religion? Answer: two. Belief in the immortality of virtue and belief in a kingdom of God on earth. Belief in the immortality of virtue is the belief that there has been and always will be virtue on this earth, that virtue has never died out; and it is the propensity to find virtue and good intentions everywhere, even on the weakest proof, but to acknowledge vice and evil intentions on nothing except the strongest proof. Belief in the kingdom of God on earth is the maxim to work for the promotion of the good at least as long as

the impossibility of success has not been clearly proven. And the motto of religion in general is: “Blessed are those who do not see and yet believe!”⁴⁶

Is righteousness possible without religion? Answer: no. (Righteousness without religion and religion without righteousness are equally impossible. The former would be righteousness without an interest in righteousness, and the latter would be an interest in righteousness without righteousness.)

Can one be righteous without believing in God? Answer: yes. (For in the question the language is undoubtedly that of theoretical belief.)

Can an atheist have religion? Answer: by all means. (One can say of a virtuous atheist <56> that he recognizes in his heart the same god that he renounces with his mouth. Practical belief and theoretical unbelief, on the one hand, and theoretical belief, which, however, is superstition, and practical unbelief, on the other hand, can no doubt co-exist.)

How does religion relate to virtue? Answer: as the part does to the whole. (Religion, understood as the maxim of unexhausted resoluteness in the promotion of the good in spite of all obstacles, is one of the appearances of the virtuous character in general.)

Can one learn religion? Answer: yes. (Just as one can and should learn justice, flexibility, and patience—namely, through practice.)

Is religion an aid to virtue? Answer: no. (For means and end cannot possibly be the same. Religion is of no use to *virtue*, but rather only to the *virtues*. It does not make character more virtuous, but it makes the appearance of the virtuous character more diverse.)

Is religion a means to frighten off vice? Answer: again, no. (Superstition can frighten off vice, but religion can never do so. Whoever fears the deity has not yet found Him. It is the good fortune of virtue to find a deity and the misfortune of vice not to find one.)

Will a kingdom of God, understood as a kingdom of truth and right, ever appear on earth? Answer: it is uncertain and—if one may build on prior experience, which, however, in comparison to the infinite future, might actually be reckoned as nothing—indeed improbable.

<57> *Could not a kingdom of Satan instead of a kingdom of God possibly appear on earth?* Answer: the one is as certain and as uncertain as the other.

Would not, accordingly, the religion of hell be just as well-founded as the religion of good people on earth? Answer: before the forum of speculation, to be sure, the one has no more and no less going for it than the other.

Is religion worship of the deity? Answer: by no means. (There is nothing at all to do with respect to a being whose existence is demonstrably uncertain and must remain uncertain for eternity. Whoever does the least thing solely for God’s sake

⁴⁶ Forberg is alluding to the biblical passage: “Jesus saith to him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20: 29).

is superstitious. Unless one wants to play with words, there is not a single duty with respect to God.)

Is the concept of religion put forward in this theory also the true and correct one? Answer: without any doubt, provided, that is, that the concept of religion is supposed to be the concept of something rational and not of something irrational. (If no other concept of religion could be discovered other than the ordinary one that has been common for thousands of years, then religion would be a chimera and henceforth intelligent people would no longer be allowed to speak of it. Since, however, a rational concept, and yet one that is somewhat related to the old irrational one, can be ascribed to the expression "religion," everyone may now decide for himself whether he finds it wiser to connect a new concept to an old expression (and thereby to expose it to the danger of being swallowed up again by the old expression) or to set aside the old expression entirely <58> but then at the same time also to find acceptance by very many people more difficult or impossible.)

And, finally, *is not the concept of a practical belief more a playful concept than an earnest philosophical one?* The answer to this vexing question one properly relinquishes to the reader who is himself favorably inclined to answer it, and one thereby simultaneously relinquishes to the reader the judgment as to whether the author of the present essay in the end only wanted to play with him!

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Chapter 3

G.: A Father's Letter to his Student Son about Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism

Commentary

In the fall of 1798, shortly after J. G. Fichte's "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance" and F. K. Forberg's "Development of the Concept of Religion" were published in the *Philosophisches Journal*, an anonymously written pamphlet, signed "G" and entitled *A Father's Letter to his Student Son about Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism*, began to circulate throughout Saxony.¹ The booklet was written in the guise of a missive from a concerned "Father" to his son "Ferdinand", a university student. Fichte's and Forberg's essays spoke to other philosophers, and especially to other transcendental idealists; the *Father's Letter* spoke to the reading public at large. Rumor implied it was the work of Johann Phillip Gabler, but that renowned theologian denied authorship.² Fichte believed

¹ "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," pp. 21–29 (GA, I, 5, pp. 347–57); "Development of the Concept of Religion," pp. 37–47 (SFA, pp. 37–58); *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten* Vol. VIII, No. 1, (Jena/Leipzig: Gabler, 1798); and *A Father's Letter to his Student Son about Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism*, pp. 57–75 (GA, I, 6, pp. 121–38). In the original printing of *Schreiben eines Vaters an seinen studierenden Sohn über den Fichtischen und Forbergischen Atheismus* [*A Father's Letter to his Student Son about Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism*] (Nürnberg, 1798) neither the author nor the publisher were identified. For more details on the publication of the *Father's Letter*, see the remarks by the editors of GA (GA, I, 6, pp. 15–24).

² Johann Phillip Gabler (1753–1826) was a theology professor at Altdorf. Fichte documents these rumors and Gabler's response by appending several documents to his *Juridical Defense*, pp. 157–204 (GA, I, 6, pp. 26–84): Johann Gottfried Dyck (1750–1813), *Ueber des Herrn Professor Fichte Appellation an das Publikum, Eine Anmerkung aus der deutschen Uebersetzung des ersten Bandes von Saint-Lamberts Tugendkunst besonders abgedruckt* [*On Herr Professor Fichte's Appeal to the Public, a Remark from the German Translation of the First Volume of Saint Lambert's Doctrine of Virtue*], which was included as "Appendix D" (GA I, 6, pp. 138–43); an excerpt from the anonymously written *Etwas zur Antwort auf das Schreiben eines Vaters an seinen studierenden Sohn über den Fichteschen und Forbergischen Atheismus: Nebst Andeutungen der Harmonie einiger religiösen Grundsätze Sokrates, Antonins, Jesus, Luthers, Kants, Fichtes und Forbergs* [*Something in Answer to A Father's Letter to his Student Son about Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism: Including Suggestions about the Harmony between the Religious Principles of Socrates, Anthonius, Jesus, Luther, Kant, Fichte, and Forberg*] (Jena/Leipzig: Gabler, 1799),

the *Father's Letter* was written by Christian Gottfried Gruner, but that notorious physician also denied authorship.³ Certainly, the fictitious brief showed none of the scholarly knowledge or stylistic grace of Gabler but rather demonstrated a shallow proclivity for pasquinade and polemic that was more characteristic of Gruner. Regardless of the author's true identity, the leaflet affected the perception of Fichte's and Forberg's essays insofar as it exposed them to a wider audience and range of criticism as well as brought them to the attention of ecclesiastical and governmental authorities.

Although G's historical personality remains elusive, the Father's philosophical and religious allegiances are easily discerned by surveying his preferred authors and glancing at his expressed opinions. He considers himself well-versed in "philosophical history" because of his familiarity with the British empiricist tradition and his ability to cite philosophers such as George Berkeley and David Hume.⁴ By and large, the mystery author prefers writings by the Berlin *Aufklärer*, such as Christoph Friedrich Nicolai and Johann Joachim Spalding, the empirical *Popularphilosophen*, such as Adam Weishaupt, and both the rational and empirical opponents of the critical philosophy, such as Friedrich Bouterwek.⁵ Moreover, he

which was included as "Appendix E" (GA, I, 6, p. 144); and an excerpt from Gabler's, "Nothgedrungene Protestation gegen ein falsches Gerücht" ["Obligatory Protest against a False Rumor"], which was included as "Appendix B" (GA, I, 6, pp. 119–20).

³ *Juridical Defense*, 191–95 (GA, I, 6, pp. 65–72). Although Fichte does not mention Christian Gottfried Gruner (1744–1815) by name, the physician's literary style and personal character is easily recognized in Fichte's description. Fichte's former student, Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781–1832) identifies Gruner as the subject of this description, which he claims is painfully accurate [*Der Briefwechsel K. C. F. Krauses* (Leipzig, 1903), p. 12–13]. Gruner denies writing the *Father's Letter* in a statement in the *Reichs-Anzeiger* of 8 May 1799 (Col. 1210) and in *Ein paar Worte zur Belehrung, Beherzigung, und Besserung an den Herrn Ex-Professor Fichte* (Jena: 1799). However, Gruner was infamous for writing slanderous and often anonymous articles.

⁴ *Father's Letter*, pp. 60–61 (GA, I, 6, pp. 124–25). George Berkeley (1685–1753) was an empiricist and a metaphysical idealist. David Hume (1711–1776) was an empiricist, who eventually became a skeptic.

⁵ *Father's Letter*, pp. 58, 62, and 75 (GA, I, 6, pp. 122, 126 and 137). Christoph Friedrich Nicolai (1733–1811) was a publisher and polemical writer. Johann Joachim Spalding (1714–1804) was an enlightened theologian and well-known neologist. The Berlin *Aufklärer* were a group of enlightened popular philosophers mainly clustered around Nicolai and his circle in Berlin. Adam Weishaupt (1748–1830) was an empiricist *Popularphilosoph* who accused Kant of subjectivism. The *Popularphilosophen* were adherents of common sense philosophy. They were united by the presupposition that philosophy could and should be intelligible to common sense and that it could and should confirm the basic beliefs of common sense. The critical philosophy was attacked by two separate groups of *Popularphilosophen*: those who were primarily influenced by the rationalist philosophers Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) and Christian Wolff (1679–1754) and those who were primarily influenced by the empiricist philosopher John Locke (1632–1704). Friedrich Bouterwek (1766–1828) was influenced by the Leibnizian-Wolffian *Popularphilosophen*

displays a partiality to deists and neologists of many stripes, including Henry Saint-John Bolingbroke, Hermann Samuel Reimarus, and Johann Friedrich Wilhelm Jerusalem.⁶ The Father prides himself on staying abreast of current philosophy as expressed in the latest issues of the *Göttingische Gelehrten Anzeigen*, but he has no patience for the “unintelligible, confused, academic babble” of transcendental idealism, advising his son to disdain the “inaneities and absurdities of the Fichtean so-called philosophy” particularly.⁷

Despite his expressed interest in philosophy, the Father's grasp of transcendental idealism is as meager as his opinion. He regards the critical philosophy as a single doctrine founded by the master Kant, canonized by the faithful disciples Reinhold and Fichte, and proselytized by their student Forberg and other “frivolous youths who so enjoy making converts.”⁸ Their philosophy, he says, is simply a novel version of a malign skepticism that has persisted from antiquity to modernity.⁹ Ultimately, Fichte and Forberg do not believe in God, or even a moral world order, because, ultimately, Kant and his idealist sycophants do not believe in anything.¹⁰ In distillation, he warns young Ferdinand, the entire “empty fad” affronts intelligible language, common sense, and natural religion.¹¹ Even Kant, the author of transcendental idealism, is utterly confused about human nature, so it comes as no surprise that Fichte, Forberg, and other “excessively rational philosophers”

and the Lockean *Popularphilosophen*. After a brief foray into transcendental idealism, he became an opponent.

⁶ *Father's Letter*, pp. 64 and 75 (GA, I, 6, pp. 127 and 137). Lord Viscount Henry Saint-John Bolingbroke (1678–1751) was an English deist and something of an enlightened dilettante. Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768), a medical doctor and enlightened deist, was made famous by Lessing's publication of his work in the *Wolfenbüttel Fragmente* (1774–78). Johann Friedrich Wilhelm Jerusalem (1709–1789) was a popular neologist, who served as court parson to the Duke of Braunschweig–Wolfenbüttel and as the rector of the Collegium Carolinum in Braunschweig. The deists were theologians who believed that certain truths of so-called natural religion (primarily, an intelligent creator, a divine providence, and human immortality) could be discovered through the exercise of human reason and observation, or natural theology. The neologists were theologians who attempted to revise church dogma in light of natural theology.

⁷ *Father's Letter*, pp. 58 and 66 (GA, I, 6, pp. 122 and 129). The *Göttingische Gelehrten Anzeigen* was a journal used by the *Popularphilosophen* to attack Kant and the critical philosophy. The Father borrowed the pejorative “Fichtean so-called philosophy” from Christoph Friedrich Nicolai (1733–1811), *Leben und Meinungen des Sempronius Gundiberts, eines deutschen Philosophen* [*The Life and Opinions of Sempronius Gundibert, a German Philosopher*] (Berlin/Stettin, 1798). In 1794, Fichte himself used this term in the title of *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre or, of So-called “Philosophy,”* EPW, pp. 94–135 (GA, I, 2, pp. 107–172).

⁸ *Father's Letter*, pp. 58 and 64 (GA, I, 6, pp. 122 and 129).

⁹ *Father's Letter*, pp. 58 and 64 (GA, I, 6, pp. 122 and 127).

¹⁰ *Father's Letter*, pp. 67–70 (GA, I, 6, pp. 130–32).

¹¹ *Father's Letter*, p. 58 (GA, I, 6, p. 122).

cannot see past their myopic “scholastic whimsy” and “utopian sophistry” to the common man’s disposition or interest: “These gentlemen have not felt the power of religion in their lives and cannot form for themselves any concepts of its influence on virtue and righteousness at all.”¹²

In the *Father’s Letter*, the paternal correspondent elides or derides Fichte’s expressed concepts of religion and righteousness with ad hominem arguments, pre-critical assumptions, and appeals to emotion.¹³ Fichte, he implies, offends the good sense of mere mortals and non-philosophers by posing as the “custodian of the human race,” but the “inexperienced, young” reformer “goes too far in his enthusiasm” and offers “invective instead of weighty reasons” for his “so-called philosophy.”¹⁴ When Fichte argues that the world viewed from the standpoint of life, as the “ground of all the phenomena occurring within itself,” cannot prove God’s existence, the Father suggests Fichte must be unaware that Hume already claimed the world was an absolute being, but that Hume admitted his skeptical objections to God’s existence were “mere cavils and sophisms.”¹⁵ Likewise, when Fichte argues that the world viewed from the standpoint of philosophy, as the “reflection of our own inner activity,” cannot prove God’s existence, the Father implies Fichte must not know that Berkeley already claimed the world consists of ideas, but that Berkeley used his idealism to “*demonstrate, in opposition to skeptics and atheists, the reality and perfection of human knowledge, the incorporeal nature of the soul, and the immediate providence of the deity.*”¹⁶ Indeed, when Fichte argues that it is impossible to make any sort of inference from a sensible, material world to a conceiving, spiritual intellect, the Father proposes Fichte fails to grasp the traditional description of a creative God as “an independent being that exists apart from the world, is capable of anything, and operates purposefully and

¹² *Father’s Letter*, pp. 60, 63, 69–74, and 75 (GA, I, 6, pp. 124–26, 132–35, and 137–38).

¹³ Pre-critical assumptions would be presuppositions about philosophy that disregard the contribution made by Kant and the critical philosophers.

¹⁴ *Father’s Letter*, pp. 60, 69–70, and 75 (GA, I, 6, pp. 124, 132, and 138). The Father borrows the pejorative “custodian of the human race” from Nicolai, *Leben und Meinungen des Sempronius Gundibert, eines deutschen Philosophen* [*The Life and Opinions of Sempronius Gundibert, a German Philosopher*] (Berlin/Stettin, 1798), p. 5. Nicolai considered Fichte an egotistical philosophical *Schwärmer*, or fanatic.

¹⁵ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” p. 22 (GA, I, 5, p. 349) and *Father’s Letter*, pp. 59–60 (GA, I, 6, p. 125). The Father refers to Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. See *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, (ed.) Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980), p. 66.

¹⁶ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” p. 23 (GA, I, 5, p. 349) and *Father’s Letter*, p. 61 (GA, I, 6, p. 125). The Father refers to Berkeley’s *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*. *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, (ed.) Robert Merrihew Adams (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1979), Title Page.

intentionally.”¹⁷ Of course, young Ferdinand, unlike Fichte, “already learned this in school.”¹⁸ Moreover, Ferdinand's Father seems to be either completely oblivious or completely resistant to Fichte's distinction between the standpoints of life and philosophy or the sensible and supersensible worlds.

In response to Fichte's claim that the moral world-order is “absolutely fundamental in all objective cognition,” the Father purports to be baffled by Fichte's notion that an ultimate ground or first principle cannot be justified and thus, by Fichte's ability to assume an immediate consciousness of a moral law “without assuming that there is a law giver” and to assume a fundamental belief in a moral world order “without assuming a creator of this order.”¹⁹ He refers Ferdinand and Fichte to Bouterwek's demand that Fichte account for the origin of intellectual intuition.²⁰ Besides feigning ignorance that Fichte's term “objective cognition” means “thinking of objects,” the Father ignores or dismisses offhand Fichte's transcendental stipulation that philosophy must eschew speculation about any “being” beyond consciousness, and then, suggests that Ferdinand would do well to read the *Popularphilosoph* Weishaupt's anti-critical writings on this point.²¹

Finally, the Father pretends that Fichte's transcendental claim that we “cannot think of personality and consciousness without limitation and finitude” is equivalent to the deist Bolingbroke's quasi-skeptical assertion that humans cannot comprehend God's “manner of being, nor of his manner of producing those effects which gives us ideas of wisdom and power.”²² According to Ferdinand's Father, Fichte believes this trite contention implies that the idea of God is “merely grounded in our imagination” and that “God does not exist.”²³ Fichte's qualms are trivial, says the Father, because “we can reliably know and experience” everything we need to understand about God if only we “employ our reason properly.”²⁴ The

¹⁷ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” p. 22 (GA, I, 5, p. 349) and *Father's Letter*, p. 61 (GA, I, 6, p. 125).

¹⁸ *Father's Letter*, p. 61 (GA, I, 6, p. 125).

¹⁹ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 26–27 (GA, I, 5, pp. 354–55) and *Father's Letter*, p. 63 (GA, I, 6, p. 126). As a man with such vast knowledge of “philosophical history,” the Father should be familiar with this foundationalist notion proposed by the rationalist philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650).

²⁰ *Father's Letter*, pp. 61–63 (GA, I, 6, pp. 125–27). The Father refers to Bouterwek's review of K. L. Reinhold's *Vermischte Schriften* in *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen*, No. 194, pp. 1929–34 (December 7, 1797).

²¹ The Father refers to Weishaupt's *Über die Lehre von den Gründen und Ursachen aller Dinge* [*On the Doctrine of the Grounds and Causes of Things*] (Regensburg, 1794).

²² “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” p. 27 (GA, I, 5, p. 355). *Father's Letter*, pp. 63–65 (GA, I, 6, pp. 127–28). The Father refers to Bolingbroke's *Philosophical Works* (London, 1754), Vol. IV, p. 18.

²³ *Father's Letter*, pp. 63–65 (GA, I, 6, pp. 127–28).

²⁴ *Father's Letter*, p. 65 (GA, I, 6, p. 128).

Father dismisses Fichte's exclusionary notions, appealing to "the rest of us poor mortals," who know that the idea of a moral world order without a moral world governor "is simply incomprehensible and unthinkable."²⁵ Moreover, he assures Ferdinand and Fichte that "teaching atheistic principles" to future "clergymen and school masters" would be no more appealing within a "Christian government" than it would be permissible within a moral world order.²⁶

Perhaps only the imaginary Ferdinand knows the Father's personal name, but any member of the enlightened intelligentsia would know his philosophical, ethical, and theological persona. The father speaks as an *Aufklärer*: no pietistic obscurantist or fanatical *Schwärmer* but rather an enlightened proponent of public sanitation and education.²⁷ Theoretically, the Father adheres to common sense philosophy; ethically, he subscribes to eudaemonism; theologically, he holds to natural religion.²⁸ As a proper neologist and *Popularphilosoph*, he deplores intuitive revelations as much as abstract sophistries, promoting instead the application of sound reason, which he equates with common sense, to all matters, including religion.²⁹ Indeed, he has confidence that properly employed reason and empirical observation demonstrate rational religion.³⁰ He is enough of a theoretical deist to prefer causal, cosmological, and teleological proofs for God's existence and enough of a practical eudaemonist to accept instrumental proofs for religion as well.³¹ Although he hopes his son would be "convinced of the existence of a highest being on the basis of reasons," Ferdinand's Father would sooner forgo soap, water, and wholesome food than tear "the chief support of virtue, i.e., belief in God, immortality, and retribution, away from inexperienced young people."³²

For the nameless author of the *Father's Letter*, religion consists in man's "active recollection of God, the author of his nature, the continually present witness to all his actions, wishes, and intentions, his highest benefactor but also his highest lawgiver and judge, to whom he owes his thanks, love, and obedience, and on whose pleasure

²⁵ *Father's Letter*, p. 66 (GA, I, 6, p. 129).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Schwärmer* was a derogatory term for a fanatic: a mystical, pietistic, or otherwise irrational enthusiast or emotionalist. For a person like the Father, any faith-based notion of religion would probably be a form of *Schwärmerei*.

²⁸ *Father's Letter*, pp. 59 and 75 (GA, I, 6, pp. 123 and 138). Eudaemonism presumes that the highest good is happiness and that morality should result in human happiness.

²⁹ The neologists were opposed to the idea of religion being based in intuition, revelation, or faith (rather than in reason and observation).

³⁰ *Father's Letter*, p. 71 (GA, I, 6, p. 133).

³¹ *Father's Letter*, pp. 59–61 and 63 (GA, I, 6, pp. 123–24 and 126). The deists preferred these sorts of proofs of God's existence because they were based on observation of the natural world.

³² *Father's Letter*, pp. 66 and 71 (GA, I, 6, pp. 129 and 133).

or displeasure his eternal weal or woe depends."³³ Although the Father claims that religious belief is rationally true, and affirms that dutiful conscientiousness is morally right, he is no less assured that religion "awakens and strengthens" moral feeling or that it promotes human "tranquility and contentment;" and thus, he is even more certain that belief in "a highest being existing apart from the world who is the creator, preserver, and ruler of all things" should be inculcated for pragmatic reasons.³⁴ Moreover, he believes that human reason and conscience would blench before the might of human sensuality and narcissism without reasonable assurance of a sensuous deterrent to vice.³⁵ Moral conscientiousness needs affective support from the religious believer's love of God's person, fear of God's power, and hope of reward in God's kingdom.³⁶ Consequently, Ferdinand's Father assures his son that theoretical atheism leads to practical atheism, which leads to moral and social depravity, and eventually, to personal despair.³⁷

The *Father's Letter* reveals the moral, social, and political conservatism inherent in *Popularphilosophie*.³⁸ According to the common sense philosophers, knowledge should be digestible for the common man and nourishing for the common child. *Aufklärung* is a project of social engineering through public education: Teach everyone to read, but restrict their reading to a palatable pabulum that increases the "enlightenment of their understanding" and the "ennoblement of their hearts."³⁹ For this breed of *Aufklärer*, transcendental idealism is an elitist and baleful influence on an enlightened society, because it values individual reason and conscience above common sense and communal values. Moreover, as the Father stresses, Fichte's idealism could become self-perpetuating because of its seductive power over gullible youths who aspire to influential positions within the academy, government, and church.⁴⁰ The *Father's Letter* was thus uniquely suited to pique enlightened church and state alike, because it portrayed Fichte and Forberg as eroding confidence in the eudaemonistic props of ecclesiastical authority as well as the deistic underpinnings of governmental authority.⁴¹ Indeed, no sooner did

³³ *Father's Letter*, pp. 57, 61, 64–67, and 74–75 (GA, I, 6, pp. 121, 125, 128–29, and 136–37). In brief, religion requires belief in an intelligent creator, eternal providence, and human immortality.

³⁴ *Father's Letter*, pp. 64–65, and 71 (GA, I, 6, pp. 128 and 133).

³⁵ *Father's Letter*, pp. 66, and 74–75 (GA, I, 6, pp. 129 and 136).

³⁶ *Father's Letter*, p. 75 (GA, I, 6, p. 137).

³⁷ *Father's Letter*, pp. 74–75 (GA, I, 6, pp. 136–37).

³⁸ For a discussion of this inherent conservatism, see Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 165–225.

³⁹ *Father's Letter*, p. 75 (GA, I, 6, p. 138).

⁴⁰ *Father's Letter*, pp. 57–58, 65–67, 69–71, and 74–75 (GA, I, 6, pp. 121–22, 129, 132–33, and 136).

⁴¹ Many of the enlightened monarchs of Germany were deists, because deism served to wrest a degree of authority from the established church.

the *Father's Letter* reach Dresden than the High Consistory approached the Saxon Elector Friedrich August about Fichte's *Philosophisches Journal* and Forberg's "Development of the Concept of Religion;" and no sooner did he hear their complaint than he issued a rescript confiscating the issue of *Philosophisches Journal* that contained the essays by Fichte and Forberg.⁴²

⁴² *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten* Vol. VIII, No. 1, (Jena/Leipzig: Gabler, 1798). The High Consistory consisted of members of the Lutheran and Evangelical Christian churches, who governed church affairs. The court of Elector Friedrich August of Saxony (1750–1827) was located in Dresden. See "Saxon Requisition Letter to the Weimar Court," pp. 83–84 (FG, 2, pp. 25–26, No. 697).

Text: A Father's Letter to his Student Son about Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism

<GA, I, 6, p. 121>

Because they took themselves to be wise, they became fools.

Romans 1:22

A few days ago, with no little sadness, I read two essays in a philosophical journal wherein principles are laid down, the dissemination of which would quite certainly have a detrimental influence on religion and morality—if they should meet with approval.⁴³ We could then no longer speak of Christianity. According to these principles, there could no longer be any religion at all; and belief in a divinity, belief in a highest being existing apart from the world, would be sheer nonsense. Therefore, my dear Ferdinand, I consider it necessary to disclose my thoughts on this matter by writing to you and to give you an opportunity to think about this subject on your own, a subject that must be of the greatest importance to every rational human being and cannot be a matter of indifference to any existing or future religious instructor, least of all.

The essays that I have in mind are to be found in the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten*, edited by Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer, doctors and professors of philosophy in Jena. (No. 1, 1798.) The first of these essays is by Professor Fichte and is entitled “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance.” The second, “Development of the Concept of Religion,” is by Rector Forberg.⁴⁴

It is difficult to accuse anyone of atheism, and in the past one even doubted whether or not there really were any *theoretical* atheists. But Messrs. *Fichte* and *Forberg* publicly state that they do not believe in God and declare belief in a divinity in the usual sense to be nonsense. (Pp. 5, 16, 18, 41ff.)⁴⁵ Mr. Fichte states right at the beginning of his essay that he has heretofore expounded on these principles in the lecture hall but now considers it his duty to lay them before the greater philosophical public for <122> examination and mutual deliberation.⁴⁶ That the coarsest atheism is being openly taught at a Christian university is certainly unheard of. And yet Fichte enjoys so much approval, it is said, that he has succeeded in *annihilating* one of his colleagues (whom he considered his rival), as he had

⁴³ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 21–29 (GA, I, 5, pp. 347–57); “Development of the Concept of Religion,” pp. 37–47 (SFA, pp. 37–58); and *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten*.

⁴⁴ Forberg was the rector of a lyceum in Saalfeld.

⁴⁵ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 26–28 (GA I, 5, pp. 354–56) and “Development of the Concept of Religion,” pp. 37–39 and 46–47 (SFA, pp. 38–42 and 57).

⁴⁶ “Divine World-Governance,” p. 21 (GA, I 5, p. 347).

publicly threatened to do (in accordance with the principle of pure morality).⁴⁷ This is really a sad spectacle. It is proof that many studious people who lack any power of judgment prefer above all else to hear and admire what they cannot understand and what sounds new to them, even if it contains no common sense at all. The inanities and absurdities of the Fichtean so-called philosophy are very clearly presented in a book that I want to recommend to you, dear Ferdinand. It is entitled *The Life and Opinions of Sempronius Gundibert, a German Philosopher* (Berlin and Stettin, 1798).⁴⁸ You will earn some small merit for yourself if you bring this book to the attention of your friends after you have read and examined it for yourself. Perhaps some of them will thereby be prevented not only from spoiling their precious and usually brief time at the university with empty fads but also from making themselves useless for any future official positions. Incidentally, one could not begrudge Mr. Fichte his enjoyment if he kept his obscure wisdom to himself. But it is inexcusable that he teaches his *atheistic* principles to young people who wish to prepare themselves for the most important governmental and ecclesiastical positions. This cannot be a matter of indifference to any friend of religion and virtue.

I credit you with understanding and a good heart, so you will not easily allow yourself to be seduced by the sophistries of the new philosophy or by frivolous youths who so enjoy making converts. But perhaps you will nonetheless find it pleasant for me to offer you a few hints that will be of further use to you. To this end I will first select the most striking passages from Fichte's essay and tell you what I think about them. What Fichte expounds here, he calls (p. 1) the results of *his* philosophizing.⁴⁹ He should have said: the ideas of the ancient and modern skeptics, which have often been expounded and have been refuted just as often, but expounded in the language of gibberish. He now intends to provide only an outline of his thoughts (p. 2) and reserves the more extensive exposition for some other time.⁵⁰ He could save himself the trouble, for he will be able to say nothing more than what has already been said a hundred times in a different manner.

Mr. Fichte intends to investigate how a human being comes to believe in a divine world-governance. <123> "Now where will the philosopher (p. 5) who presupposes that belief search for its necessary ground, which he is supposed to bring to light? Perhaps in an alleged necessity of inferring a rational creator of the sensible world from the existence or the constitution of that very world? Not at all;

⁴⁷ Christian Erhard Schmid (1761–1812) was a Kantian in Jena with whom Fichte was engaged in debate from 1794 until 1796, when he declared Schmid "*nonexistent as a philosopher*." See "A Comparison of Prof. Schmid's System and the *Wissenschaftslehre* [Excerpt]," EPW, pp. 316–335 (GA I, 3, pp. 255–71).

⁴⁸ *Leben und Meinungen des Sempronius Gundibert, eines deutschen Philosophen* [*The Life and Opinions of Sempronius Gundibert, a German Philosopher*] (Berlin/Stettin, 1798) was a parody of Kant and Fichte written by Nicolai.

⁴⁹ "Divine World-Governance," p. 21 (GA, I, 5, p. 347).

⁵⁰ "Divine World-Governance," pp. 21–22 (GA, I, 5, pp. 347–48).

for he knows too well that a misguided philosophy (in the embarrassing situation of being obliged to explain something whose existence it cannot deny but whose true ground is hidden from it) is indeed capable of such an inference, but never the original understanding that stands under the guardianship of reason and under the direction of its mechanisms."⁵¹

Therefore, only a *misguided* philosophy can infer a rational creator of the sensible world from the existence or the constitution of that very world, and such a philosophy makes this inference while it is in the embarrassing situation of being obliged to explain something whose existence it cannot deny. *What*, then, is it supposed to explain? The sensible world? To say this is to say nothing. Philosophy—and even common sense (our sublime philosophers, however, do not think at all highly of it)—asks: *How* does this sensible world *arise*? Did it originate on its own through blind chance, or does it have a creator? This question is certainly not irrational. It urges itself upon every thinking person on its own, even if he has never heard anything about philosophy in his entire life. According to Fichte's statement, however, only a *misguided philosophy* should be capable of posing such questions. Now for more (p. 5): "Either one views the sensible world from the standpoint of ordinary consciousness, which one can also call the standpoint of natural science, or one views it from the transcendental viewpoint. In the first case, reason is obliged (?) to limit itself to the being of the world as an absolute; the world exists, simply because it exists, and it is as it is, simply because it is as it is."⁵² Very good! I must therefore also say of the individual parts of the world that they exist because they exist. The sun exists because it exists, and it is as it is, simply because it is as it is. I am not allowed to ask additional questions: Why does it exist? What influence does it have on the earth and the other planets? I have to limit myself to the being of the sun as an absolute. This is what it means to philosophize!

"This standpoint begins from an absolute being, and this absolute being is just the world; both concepts are identical. The world becomes a self-grounding whole, a whole complete in itself, and precisely for this reason an organized and organizing whole that contains in itself and its immanent laws the ground of all the phenomena occurring within itself."⁵³ When this is translated into intelligible German, it must undoubtedly mean the following: the world has given existence to itself; it is indeed an *organized* whole; however, it has organized itself and rules itself in accordance with immanent laws. This is just as clever as if I said: this splendid palace that I see here before me built itself; it laid out the rooms therein itself, manufactured and positioned the furniture, and arranged everything just as

⁵¹ "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," pp. 22–23 (GA, I, 5, p. 349).

⁵² "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," pp. 22–23 (GA, I, 5, p. 349). The question mark is added by the author of the *Father's Letter*.

⁵³ "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," pp. 22–23 (GA, I, 5, p. 349).

its occupants wished. Or if I said: this clock was not manufactured by an artisan; it made, assembled, and arranged its gears itself, so that it can now tell minutes and hours. To be sure, it would hardly be to Mr. Fichte's credit <124> if these were the real results of his philosophizing, as he assured us at the beginning of his essay. But anyone who has read *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* by the well-known David Hume would be hard put to believe that he himself has hit upon the bright idea of attributing absolute being to the world.⁵⁴

"Insofar as only *the world and its forms* are really supposed to be explained (and we therefore find ourselves in the realm of pure—I say, *pure*—natural science), an explanation of the world and its forms that is based on the purposes of an intellect is total nonsense."⁵⁵ I do not know what the author means by *pure* natural science (according to which there would also have to be *impure* natural science), but I understand well enough when he says that it is *total nonsense* to believe that the world has been created by an intelligent, thinking being.⁵⁶ Hume was more humble. He himself confesses at the end that his objections against an independent, original cause that operates purposefully and intentionally only arose from an inclination towards the peculiar and are actually "mere cavils and sophisms" or amount to a verbal dispute.⁵⁷ But Mr. Fichte does not get the joke. He is completely certain about the matter and calls the customary rational doctrine of God "total nonsense." One must just accept that a custodian of the human race, as the philosopher Fichte claims to be, from time to time goes too far in his enthusiasm and gives us invective instead of weighty reasons.⁵⁸

"Moreover, the proposition that an intellect is the creator of the sensible world is not of the slightest help to us and brings us no closer to our goal; for the proposition is not the least bit intelligible and provides us with a few empty words instead of an answer to a question that we should not have posed. Undoubtedly, the determinations of an intellect are concepts. The first intelligible word has yet to be put forward as to how the latter may be transformed into matter (as in that monstrous system of a creation out of nothing) or may modify already extant matter (as in that not much more rational system of the mere manipulation of

⁵⁴ *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (London: 1779) was published after Hume's death. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* is available in a recent edition edited by Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980).

⁵⁵ "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," pp. 22–23 (GA, I, 5, p. 349).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ This is not necessarily Hume's confession but rather his character Philo's: "In many views of the universe, and of its parts, particularly the latter, the beauty and fitness of final causes strike us with such irresistible force, that all the objections appear (what I believe they really are) mere cavils and sophisms; nor can we then imagine how it was ever possible to repose any weight on them" (*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, p. 66).

⁵⁸ The author of the *Father's Letter* is borrowing the wit of Nicolai.

independent, eternal matter)."⁵⁹ <125> When we come to Mr. *Forberg* below, we will further investigate whether or not the proposition "an intellect is the creator of the sensible world" is of any help to us. The proposition, as Mr. Fichte explains it, really lacks intelligibility; however, it is not supposed to be intelligible, because Fichte does not want it to be. "Undoubtedly, the determinations of an intellect (he says) are concepts."⁶⁰ What is this supposed to mean? Presumably, that an intellect merely consists of concepts and has no power besides that of forming concepts for itself. These concepts (this is presumably what the words that come next are supposed to mean) can neither be transformed into matter (as is believed by those who accept a creation out of nothing) nor modify already extant matter (as is imagined by those who think of creation in terms of the mere manipulation of independent, eternal matter)—Quite right, Mr. Philosopher! Whoever understands the proposition "an intellect is the creator of the sensible world" in this fashion provides us with empty words. But which rational human being has understood it in this fashion? This is sophistry—if I may speak so freely—and involves a conceptual confusion. If we call God "an intellect," then we are thinking of an independent being that exists apart from the world, is capable of anything, and operates purposefully and intentionally. You have already learned this in school, dear Ferdinand. I also explained to you on a certain occasion, as you will recall, how to understand what it means when one says that God created the world out of nothing: that is, through His omnipotent will, without any extant matter or tools. After this explanation you yourself gave me the reply to the objection that *nothing comes from nothing*.

"If one views the sensible world from the transcendental viewpoint, then, of course, all of these difficulties disappear. Then there is no world subsisting for itself: in all that we behold, we merely view the reflection of our own inner activity. But we cannot ask for the ground of that which does not exist; nothing outside of it can be assumed in order to explain it."⁶¹ This conclusion is not quite right. Mr. Fichte must not have gotten very far into philosophical history: otherwise, he would have taken *Berkeley's idealism* into consideration. Berkeley, in *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous* (where he has articulated his ideas most distinctly), explained on the title page that they were written *in order to demonstrate, in opposition to skeptics and atheists, the reality and perfection of human knowledge, the incorporeal nature of the soul, and the immediate providence of the deity*.⁶²

⁵⁹ "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," pp. 22–23 (GA, I, 5, p. 349).

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," pp. 22–23 (GA, I, 5, pp. 349–50).

⁶² *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (London, 1713). The recent edition edited by Robert Merrihew Adams (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1979) includes the original title page, which reads: "Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous. The Design of which Is plainly to demonstrate the Reality and Perfection of

Nonetheless, Mr. Fichte surmises (p. 6) that one might perhaps ask for the ground of the I.⁶³ The *Göttingische Gelehrten Anzeigen* reminded him of this fact in its review of his *Wissenschaftslehre*.⁶⁴ He responds quite briefly: “*The sort of <126> people that one has to deal with when one occupies oneself with philosophy in our philosophical century! Can the I explain itself (or even wish to explain itself) without going outside of itself and ceasing to be an I?*”⁶⁵—*Capiat, qui capere potest!* [“Let him take it who can!”]

Now, dear Ferdinand, you will perhaps be eager to learn whether or not Mr. Fichte nevertheless accepts some sort of deity. By all means. He believes in a *living and active moral world-order*, and this world-order is his God.⁶⁶ You can read his confused deduction (pp. 8 ff.) for yourself if you desire to get to know it more precisely.⁶⁷ I lack the time and the desire to analyze it and engage myself in a repetition of his sophistries. Only a few observations on the main section of his argument are in order here.

“That living and active moral order (p. 15) is *itself God*; we require no other god and can grasp no other.”⁶⁸ There is no ground in reason from which one can proceed and, by means of an inference from that which is grounded to its ground, assume some separate being as the cause of that which is grounded. Consequently, original understanding certainly does not make this inference and knows no such separate being. Only a philosophy that misunderstands itself makes this inference. Is, then, that order something accidental that could exist or not, could be what it is or also be otherwise, so that you would first have to explain its existence and its constitution by appealing to a ground and then would have to legitimate faith in this order by producing this ground?⁶⁹ If you will no longer listen to the demands

Humane Knowledge, the Incorporeal Nature of the Soul, and the Immediate Providence of a DEITY: In Opposition to Skeptics and Atheists. Also, To open a Method for rendering the Sciences more easy, useful, and compendious.”

⁶³ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” p. 23n. (GA, I, 5, p. 350). The “I” was one term that Fichte used to express the first principle of his philosophy.

⁶⁴ Friedrich Bouterwek (1766–1828), in his review of K. L. Reinhold’s *Vermischte Schriften* in *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen*, no. 194, pp. 1929–34 (December 7, 1797) criticized Fichte for failing to demonstrate the ground of the I. The *Göttingische Anzeigen* published many negative comments on Fichte’s works.

⁶⁵ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” p. 23n.. (GA, I, 5, p. 350.) The author of the *Father’s Letter* substituted “hat” for “bekommt” and put the entire quotation in italics.

⁶⁶ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 26–27 (GA, I, 5, p. 354).

⁶⁷ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 25–27 (GA, I, 5, pp. 353–54).

⁶⁸ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 2–27 (GA, I, 5, pp. 354–55). The italics were added by the author of the *Father’s Letter*.

⁶⁹ The author of the *Father’s Letter* did not retain Fichte’s italicization of the original “so”; hence “what” is not italicized in the translation.

of a worthless system, but will instead interrogate your own inner self, then you will find that this world-order is what is absolutely fundamental in all objective cognition, etc.”⁷⁰

This argument is so confused that one can scarcely guess what the author wants to say. This much one can no doubt discern: the author assumes an order without assuming a creator of this order; he assumes that there is a moral law in mankind without assuming that there is a law giver. The moral order is what is absolutely fundamental in all *cognition*.⁷¹ Granted, that would be correct, even though experience disputes this fact. Is it, then, also the foundation of all *being*? For someone who knows how to calculate the value of his precious time, it is not worth the effort to occupy himself with the useless, scholastic whimsy that nowadays makes up the favorite subject matter of lazy minds. By the way, the following book seems to me to be useful to those who wish to read something intelligible about this matter: Adam Weishaupt, *On the Doctrine of the Grounds and Causes of Things* (Regensburg, 1794).⁷² I am not completely of the author's opinion, <127> but there is common sense in his book. I place great emphasis on common sense, however much it is decried by our excessively rational philosophers, and one can obey it even when scaling the steep and dizzying heights of metaphysics. Nevertheless, I did not intend to advise you to read books of this sort right now lest you take time away from the study of the more important sciences.

Yet another hackneyed objection to our cognition of God is repeated by our philosopher as being a result of his philosophizing; and here he finds himself persuaded, which is otherwise not the case with his ilk. “Even if one were willing to permit you (pp. 16–17) to make that inference and by means of it to assume a separate being as the cause of that moral world-order, what have you then actually assumed?”⁷³ This being is supposed to be distinct from you and the world. It is supposed to be active in the world by means of concepts. Consequently, it is supposed to be able to have concepts, to possess personality and consciousness. What, then, does he denote as personality and consciousness?⁷⁴ Perhaps what you have found within yourselves, have gotten to know about yourselves, and have labeled with these names? However, the least attention to your construction of these

⁷⁰ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” p. 27 (GA, I, 5, pp. 354–55). The author of the *Father's Letter* added “etc.”

⁷¹ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” p. 26 (GA, I, 5, p. 355).

⁷² *Über die Lehre von den Gründen und Ursachen aller Dinge* (Regensburg, 1794). Weishaupt, a professor of law in Ingolstadt, was a founder of the Illuminati. He was also among the empiricist *Popularphilosophen* who accused Kant of subjectivism.

⁷³ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” p. 27 (GA, I, 5, p. 355). The author of the *Father's Letter* deletes the original “denn” from the beginning of this sentence.

⁷⁴ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” p. 27 (GA, I, 5, p. 355). The author of the *Father's Letter* changed the original “ihr” to “er” in this sentence.

concepts can teach you that you simply do not and cannot think of personality and consciousness without limitation and finitude. Consequently, by attributing these predicates to this being you make it into something finite, into a being similar to yourselves; and you have not thought of God, as you wished, but rather you have only multiplied yourselves in your thinking. You can just as scarcely explain this moral world-order by appealing to this being as you can explain it by appealing to yourselves. It remains, as before, unexplained and absolute; and in using such words you have in fact not been thinking at all but rather have merely vibrated the air with an empty sound. You could have easily foreseen that you would fare this way. You are finite. How could that which is finite encompass and comprehend the infinite?"⁷⁵

Several skeptics have maintained that cognition of the divine attributes is impossible for us human beings, without denying that there is a God and that He exists apart from the world. It is also well-known that the critical philosophers unanimously maintain that our cognition of God does not possess *objective* validity.⁷⁶ Bolingbroke said that by transferring our concepts of *moral* attributes to God, man is made into the original and God is made into a copy or an infinite human being.⁷⁷ Therefore, what Mr. Fichte says here is not at all new. The question is only whether or not it is correctly inferred that because we cannot comprehend God's being and His attributes, it follows that God does not exist. <128> We have long known that all our cognition of God is only analogical. Instead of the attributes that we call "consciousness," "understanding," "will," "wisdom," "justice," etc., there is something infinitely perfect in God. But it does not follow from this that these and other such attributes, insofar as they are ascribed to God, are merely grounded in our imagination. We know, of course, none but the usual names by which we designate these attributes. Wisdom remains wisdom, regardless of whether it is expressed to a greater or lesser degree. Goodness remains goodness, regardless of whether it is limited to something small or is extended to everything. The concept of power must ground even the representation of omnipotence, however great the

⁷⁵ "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," p. 27 (GA, I, 5, p. 355).

⁷⁶ The author of the *Father's Letter* seems to be indicating that he is familiar with the critical philosophy of Kant and Reinhold and that he is aware that they maintain God is an object of faith rather than an object of knowledge.

⁷⁷ Lord Viscount Henry Saint-John Bolingbroke: "Instead of transferring from God to man, to use a phrase of Cicero, they transfer from man to God; and whilst they boast that man is made after the image of God, they make God after the image of man. What they present to us for a copy, is the original; and what they present for the original, is in reality the copy. Tho [sic] we rise from the knowledge of ourselves, and of the other works of God, to a knowledge of his existence and his wisdom and power, which we call infinities [...] yet we cannot rise thus to a knowledge of his manner of being, nor of his manner of producing those effects which gives us ideas of wisdom and power" (*Philosophical Works* [London, 1754], p. 18).

disparity between the power of weak human beings and omnipotence. Let us grant that it is impossible to know what God *in Himself* is. It is enough that we know what He is for us and what we may expect of Him, and this we can reliably know and experience if we are willing to employ our reason properly.

Mr. Fichte concludes his essay boldly enough with the following passage: "It is therefore a misunderstanding to say that it is doubtful whether a God exists or not. It is not doubtful at all but rather the most certain thing that there is. Indeed, it is the ground of all other certainty, the single absolutely valid objective fact: that there is a moral world-order, that a determinate place in this order is assigned to every rational individual and his work is taken into account; that the destiny of each individual, insofar as it is not caused, so to speak, by his own conduct, is a result of this plan; that without this plan no hair falls from his head and within his sphere of activity no sparrow falls from a roof; that each truly good action succeeds and each truly evil one fails; and that for those who rightly love only the good, all things must conduce to the best. Moreover, it can just as scarcely remain doubtful, to one who reflects for only a moment and is willing to admit honestly to himself the result of this reflection, *that the concept of God as a separate substance is impossible and contradictory; it is permissible to say this openly and to quash the babble of the schools, so that the religion of joyous right action (???) may arise.*"⁷⁸

If this passage is translated into intelligible German, it could mean something like the following: "The critical philosophers have heretofore said that it is doubtful whether or not there is a God. But they were in error. They should have said that there is no God. There is, however, a moral world-order, and it is the ground of all other certainty, the single absolutely valid ... etc." Mr. Fichte seems not to have understood himself here or is trying to throw sand in his readers' eyes. We ask whether or not there is a God, a highest being existing apart from the world who is the creator, preserver, and ruler of all things; and he speaks of a world-order *as the ground of all other certainty, as the single absolutely valid objective fact. In this order every rational individual* <129> *is assigned his place.* Who or what, then, assigned him his place? This order itself? Or chance? Or blind necessity? Or Fichte, who presumes to act as a custodian of the human race?⁷⁹ "*The destiny of each* (of every individual), *insofar as it is not caused, so to speak, by his own conduct, is a result of this plan, and without it* (this plan) *no hair falls from his head and within his or its* (whose? the individual's or the plan's?) *sphere of activity no sparrow falls from a roof.*"⁸⁰ Thus, as the author has already said (p. 15), the

⁷⁸ "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," pp. 27–28 (GA, I, 5, pp. 355–56). The author of the *Father's Letter* added the italics and three question marks to the final sentence in this passage.

⁷⁹ Once again, the author of the *Father's Letter* is borrowing the wit of Nicolai.

⁸⁰ "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," p. 27 (GA, I, 5, p. 356). The words in parentheses were interpolated by the author of the *Father's Letter*. The

world-order, the plan, is *living* and *active*.⁸¹ For the rest of us poor mortals, a living and self-active plan, which is not drawn up and carried out by an intelligent being, is simply incomprehensible and unthinkable. Therefore, we must relinquish such high wisdom to Mr. Fichte and his faithful disciples and to them alone. “*Each truly good action succeeds, and each truly evil one fails; and for those who rightly love only the good, all things must conduce to the best.*”⁸² Presumably, this is supposed to mean that each good action has good consequences and every evil action has evil consequences, because the words “for those who rightly love only the good, etc.” require this meaning. Quite right! Only *we* must also have certain assurance that our actions are genuinely good. But preaching atheism and snatching the chief support of virtue, i.e., belief in God, immortality, and retribution, away from inexperienced young people is truly not a good action. Mr. Fichte does this, and he *once more plainly declares the concept of God as a separate substance to be impossible and contradictory*. He calls the correct doctrine of God “the babble of the schools” and regards it as his duty to put an end to it, “*so that,*” as he says, “*the true religion of joyous right action may arise.*” Perhaps he meant to say “so that the door to every vice may be opened.” And a young man, whose entire so-called philosophy is thoroughly unintelligible, confused, academic babble, ought not to speak of the babble of the schools at all. By the way, I would like to ask Mr. Fichte whether or not openly teaching atheistic principles to young people, some of whom are destined to take up teaching positions in the churches and the schools, can be consistent with morality. A Christian government will certainly not want to prefer atheists to its ecclesiastical offices. Such clergymen and school masters will thus have to teach for form’s sake that there is a God. According to their principles, however, this would be a lie, and Fichte lays down the following rule (p. 14): “*You may not lie, even if the world should crumble into ruins as a result.*”⁸³ Yet he immediately turns around and says: “But this is only a figure of speech. If you were able to believe in earnest that it would crumble, then at the very least your being would be absolutely contradictory and self-annihilating. But you just do not believe this. Neither can you nor may you believe it. You know that certainly no reckoning is made for a lie in the plan of the world’s preservation.”⁸⁴ Elegant and thorough! Even witty!

Now, dear Ferdinand, I will pass on to you several remarks regarding the essay by Rector *Forberg*. But since my time is very limited, as you know, I will have to

original “*seiner*” was rendered as “his or its” in the translation to indicate that the author of the *Father’s Letter* thought the antecedent was ambiguous.

⁸¹ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 26–27 (GA, I, 5, p. 354).

⁸² “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 27–28 (GA, I, 5, p. 356). The author of the *Father’s Letter* italicizes and slightly alters this sentence.

⁸³ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 26–27 (GA, I, 5, p. 354).

⁸⁴ Ibid.

be brief. His essay is entitled <130> "Development of the Concept of Religion" and can to a certain degree be regarded as a continuation and further elaboration of Fichte's essay. At least Fichte himself says (p. 2) that Forberg's essay agrees in many respects with his own convictions and that he can appeal to it.⁸⁵ In many a passage the agreement is obvious. Mr. Forberg speaks as Mr. Fichte does of a moral-order, and right at the beginning he says that *religion* is nothing other than a *practical faith in a moral-order*. He also explains to us what he means by a moral-order, which Mr. Fichte has not done. That is, if things happen in the world (pp. 21–22) so that the ultimate success of the good is expected, then there is a moral-order.⁸⁶ If, on the contrary, fate is unconcerned about virtue and vice, then there is no moral-order. Such governance exists (so he says on pp. 22 ff.), and there is a *divinity* that rules the world in accordance with moral laws.⁸⁷ This sounds quite good. But Mr. Forberg, like his master, has his own (though entirely different) divinity, as you will learn in a moment; and right at the beginning (p. 22) he declares the speculative concepts of God as the most real, infinite, absolutely necessary being to be a matter of indifference at the very least.⁸⁸ Religion, in his opinion, can co-exist just as well with polytheism as with monotheism, just as well with anthropomorphism as with spiritualism. The main purpose of his essay is to show *what faith in a moral-order is founded on*.⁸⁹

Here, to be sure, both of our philosophers fall into a small contradiction, one that will indeed appear somewhat strange to unbiased readers, but one that does no damage to the fact that these men are in agreement. For, according to their philosophy, something can be simultaneously and unambiguously true and untrue, possible and impossible. According to Fichte, the moral world-order is itself God; and thus it is something very real, the highest thing that can be thought by human reason. According to Mr. *Forberg*, however, there is no moral-order; it is something nonsensical. He was only joking when he initially said that there is a moral-order; it means nothing, however, when a sublime philosopher in all seriousness contradicts himself in the same breath.⁹⁰ He still remains a philosopher for that reason. That there is a moral-order, however, Mr. *Forberg* proves on the basis of the following reasons. There are only three sources from which we must in the end draw all of our conviction: *experience*, *speculation*, and *conscience*.⁹¹

Experience is out of the question here, for it can sooner be inferred from experience (p. 23) that the world is not governed in a moral fashion, or at least that an evil genius struggles with a good one for world supremacy, and now and

⁸⁵ "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," p. 21 (GA, I, 5, p. 347).

⁸⁶ "Development of the Concept of Religion," p. 37 (SFA, pp. 37–38).

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ "Development of the Concept of Religion," p. 37 (SFA, p. 38).

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ "Development of the Concept of Religion," pp. 46–47 (SFA, pp. 56–8).

⁹¹ "Development of the Concept of Religion," p. 37 (SFA, p. 38).

then the good one, but usually the evil one, maintains the upper hand.⁹² Whoever looks for the deity *outside of himself* in the course of things will never find Him. <131> (Mr. Forberg thus knows of no divinity existing outside of himself at all: he has divinity merely within himself; it is his own divinity.) “*He will meet with ‘the work of the devil’ on all sides, but only rarely, and always shyly and doubtfully, will he be able to say: ‘Here is God’s hand!’*”⁹³ Even speculation cannot find a divinity; consequently, it also cannot find a moral-order. Here Forberg is thinking of the usual proofs of God’s existence, and he rebuffs them from several sides (pp. 23–26).⁹⁴ They are all worthless. Why? Because they are *supposed* to be worthless. Consequently, nothing remains but *conscience*, which grounds *religion*, i.e., faith in a moral-order, on its dictums. Here it seems as if Mr. Forberg again intends in all seriousness to assert that there is a moral-order. He poses the question (p. 27) of “*how and in what way religion* (that is, as he explained earlier, faith in a moral-order) *arises in the heart, and only in the heart, of a morally good person?*”⁹⁵ His answer is brief: “*Religion arises solely from the wish of a good heart that the good in the world may maintain the upper hand over the evil in the world.*”⁹⁶ This probably means something like the following: the good person believes in a moral-order because he wishes for one to exist. A lot of twaddle is then uttered about this (pp. 27–38), and finally this belief winds up in an extremely precarious condition.⁹⁷ Because the good person *wishes* (pp. 36–37) for goodness to reign supreme everywhere on the earth, he must also do all that he can to help to bring about this goal.⁹⁸ He *does not know* that this goal is possible; he *believes*, however, that it is.⁹⁹ Why? Because he *wants* to believe this, although even this is at his discretion. What, then, should not be a matter of discretion for a philosopher? “*It is not a duty to believe* (p. 38) that a moral-order or God as the moral world-sovereign exists; instead, it is merely *a duty to act as if one believed it.*”¹⁰⁰ In moments of reflection or disputation one can behave as one wishes. One can declare oneself for theism or atheism to the extent that one thinks it possible to defend oneself in the forum of speculative reason ... Only in real life, where something ought to be done, is it a duty *not* to act as if one presupposed that it is already in vain to make much of a fuss over promoting good in the world, etc.”¹⁰¹ Once again (p. 40), this means that *religion* is nothing but *faith* in the success of

⁹² “Development of the Concept of Religion,” pp. 37–38 (SFA, pp. 38–9).

⁹³ “Development of the Concept of Religion,” pp. 37–38 (SFA, p. 39).

⁹⁴ “Development of the Concept of Religion,” pp. 37–39 (SFA, pp. 39–41).

⁹⁵ “Development of the Concept of Religion,” p. 39 (SFA, p. 42).

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ “Development of the Concept of Religion,” pp. 39–43 (SFA, pp. 42–9).

⁹⁸ “Development of the Concept of Religion,” p. 43 (SFA, p. 50).

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ “Development of the Concept of Religion,” pp. 43–44 (SFA, p. 51).

¹⁰¹ “Development of the Concept of Religion,” pp. 43–44 (SFA, pp. 51–2). The author of the *Father’s Letter* omitted part of one sentence, which is indicated with the ellipsis.

the cause of goodness.¹⁰² Who can make sense of this? That Mr. Forberg's faith in a moral world-governance (the only true divinity for Mr. Fichte) is very weak and shaky, however, is demonstrated by the questions that he poses (p. 45), along with his answers to them.¹⁰³ Question: "*Will <132> a kingdom of God, understood as a kingdom of truth and right, ever appear on earth?*" Answer: *it is uncertain and—if one may build on prior experience, which, however, in comparison to the infinite future, might actually be reckoned as nothing—indeed improbable.*"¹⁰⁴ Question: "*Could not a kingdom of Satan instead of a kingdom of God possibly appear on earth?*" Answer: *the one is as certain and as uncertain as the other.*"¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, Mr. Fichte assures us that Mr. Forberg agrees with him. We poor non-philosophers, of course, cannot remove such contradictions. But nothing would be gained by extending assistance of this sort to a so-called philosophy that is composed of contradictions and absurdities.

The rector ultimately poses a few questions (pp. 41 ff.) that he calls "vexing" and answers them in his own way.¹⁰⁶ It is not worth the effort required to mention them. You can read them without any worries, for I have so much confidence in your understanding that you will be able to judge their worth (or rather their worthlessness) for yourself. I will only dwell on the *first* question for a few moments, because it will give me the opportunity to jog your memory regarding several important truths that are not repeated often enough these days and that cannot be contemplated too earnestly.

Mr. Forberg asks (p. 41): "*Does God exist?*"¹⁰⁷ He answers: "It is and remains uncertain. *For (?)* this question is merely raised out of speculative curiosity, and it serves the curious person quite right if he is sometimes rebuffed."¹⁰⁸

Would, then, the question of God's existence be raised out of merely speculative curiosity? And can a rector assert this, a rector who is supposed to bestow a thorough religious education on young people? Of course, one sees from Forberg's judgments and from those of his master Fichte that these gentlemen have not felt the power of religion in their lives and cannot form for themselves any concepts of its influence on virtue and righteousness at all. But how, then, do they know that all the other people in the world think and feel just as they do, that they all pose the aforementioned question (and the other ones connected to it) out of *mere curiosity*, without having any interest in it? By means of such assertions, these gentlemen

¹⁰² "Development of the Concept of Religion," pp. 44–46 (SFA, p. 53).

¹⁰³ "Development of the Concept of Religion," pp. 46–47 (SFA, pp. 56–7).

¹⁰⁴ "Development of the Concept of Religion," p. 46 (SFA, p. 56). The author of the *Father's Letter* adds the italics to this sentence.

¹⁰⁵ "Development of the Concept of Religion," pp. 46–47 (SFA, p. 57). The author of the *Father's Letter* adds the italics to this sentence.

¹⁰⁶ "Development of the Concept of Religion," pp. 45–47 (SFA, pp. 54–8).

¹⁰⁷ "Development of the Concept of Religion," p. 45 (SFA, p. 54).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. The author of the *Father's Letter* adds the italics and question mark to this sentence.

demonstrate quite distinctly that they are completely unfamiliar with the needs of mankind; and if they did not intend in all their ignorance to set themselves up as reformers, then as inexperienced young men they would not be too much to blame. It seems, however, that at least Rector Forberg is not even being serious in what he asserts. For in the end he raises this question: “*Is not the concept of a practical belief more a playful concept than an earnest philosophical one?*”¹⁰⁹ The answer, he adds, “the answer to this vexing question one properly relinquishes to the reader who is ... favorably inclined to answer it, and one thereby simultaneously relinquishes to the reader the judgment as to <133> whether the author of the present essay in the end only wanted to play with him!”¹¹⁰ What a witty remark! To make young people suspicious of believing in God and to sow the seeds of immorality—this is truly an inexcusable game. It is cruelty.

Since this topic is so important, I want to say a little to remind you of some of the chief grounds on which a demonstration of the *importance* of religion (or living faith in a highest, perfect, moral world-regent as He relates to us human beings) can be based. Now it is not a question of the ground of this belief, or the lack of a ground thereof—for I hope that in any case you will be convinced of the existence of a highest being on the basis of reasons—but rather merely a question of the *importance* of this belief.

Does mankind require religion for its moral improvement? Can our moral feeling be awakened and strengthened by a living faith in God, providence, and immortality? Can our tranquility and contentment be promoted by such a faith? Kant, who has confused the minds of so many theologians with his work *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, asserts the following, among other things, right at the beginning of the preface to that book: “Morality, insofar as it is grounded on the concept of man as a free being (but who for this very reason also binds himself through his reason to unconditioned laws), requires neither the idea of another being above him in order for him to *know* his duty nor an *incentive* other than the law itself in order for him to do his duty. By no means does morality require religion for its own benefit (neither objectively, as regards the will, nor subjectively, as regards the capacity to act); rather, by virtue of practical reason it is self-sufficient.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ “Development of the Concept of Religion,” p. 47 (SFA, p. 58).

¹¹⁰ Ibid. The author of the *Father's Letter* omitted the original “selbst” from this sentence.

¹¹¹ Kant: “Die Moral, so fern sie auf dem Begriffe des Menschen, als eines freyen, eben darum aber auch sich selbst durch seine Vernunft an unbedingte Gesetze bindenden Wesens, gegründet ist, bedarf weder der Idee eines andern Wesens über ihm, um seine Pflicht zu erkennen, noch einer andern Triebfeder als des Gesetzes selbst, um sie zu beobachten. [...] Sie bedarf also zum Behuf ihrer selbst (sowol objectiv, was das Wollen, als subjectiv, was das Können betrifft) keinesweges der Religion, sondern vermöge der reinen practischen Vernunft, ist sie sich selbst genug” (*Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, AA, VI, p. 3). The author of the *Father's Letter* slightly modified the quotation and added the italics.

And on page 215 (of the first edition) the following is to be found in the note: "The *minimum* of what can be known (it is possible that God may exist) must be subjectively sufficient for whatever can be made into everyone's duty."¹¹² When one reads these and similar passages, one is bound to think that *Kant* must have an extremely exalted concept of man's powers for doing good. For a being who can attain so high a degree of moral perfection through its own power that it requires no further incentive whatsoever besides mere cognition of the law and does not require religion—such a being must be good by nature, or at least must be far more inclined to doing good than to doing evil. One is bound to think this. Nevertheless, in a particular section (pp. 24 ff.) it is asserted that *man is evil by nature*, <134> almost entirely corrupt.¹¹³ Let him be observed in the so-called state of nature or in a civilized condition, and the long, melancholy litany of indictments against mankind will be granted to be completely true. Now, the question is: how can a human being who needs nothing for acting in conformity with the law besides mere cognition of the law, who requires no incentive whatsoever for fulfilling his duty, simultaneously be so extremely evil by nature, and how can such an extremely corrupt human being improve himself? *Kant*, of course, does not know, but he regards it as possible to know the answer, although he cannot comprehend the possibility. Here we thus have a great secret. "How it is possible (pp. 46 ff.) for a naturally evil human being to turn himself into a good human being *surpasses all of our concepts*; for how can an evil tree produce good fruit? But since a tree that was originally good (as regards its predisposition) has brought forth evil fruit, and since the lapse of good into evil (when one remembers that it arises out of freedom) is no more comprehensible than rising again from evil to good, the possibility of the latter cannot be denied. For in spite of that fall, the command that we *should* become better human beings resounds in an undiminished fashion in our souls; consequently, we must also be capable of it, even if what we are able to do should be insufficient on its own; and *for this reason we simply make ourselves receptive to a higher assistance that is inscrutable to us*."¹¹⁴ I do not intend to investigate

¹¹² Kant: "Zu dem, was jedem Menschen zur Pflicht gemacht werden kann, muß das *Minimum* der Erkenntniß (es ist möglich, daß ein Gott sey), subjectiv schon hinreichend seyn" (*Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, AA, VI, p. 154n.).

¹¹³ *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, AA, VI, pp. 44–45.

¹¹⁴ "Wie es nun möglich sei, daß ein natürlicherweise böser Mensch sich selbst zum guten Menschen mache, das übersteigt alle unsere Begriffe; denn wie kann ein böser Baum gute Früchte bringen? Da aber doch nach dem vorher abgelegten Geständnisse ein ursprünglich (der Anlage nach) guter Baum arge Früchte hervorgebracht hat und der Verfall vom Guten ins Böse (wenn man wohl bedenkt, daß dieses aus der Freiheit entspringt), nicht begreiflicher ist, als das Wiederaufstehen aus dem Bösen zum Guten; so kann die Möglichkeit des letztern nicht bestritten werden. Denn, ungeachtet jenes Abfalls, erschallt doch das Gebot: wir *sollen* bessere Menschen werden, unvermindert in unserer Seele; folglich müssen wir es auch können, sollte auch das, was wir thun können, für sich allein unzureichend sein, und wir uns dadurch nur eines für uns unerforschlichen höheren

the accuracy or the inaccuracy of this reasoning. I only want to say that it seems quite peculiar to me that the founder of the critical philosophy himself admits that higher assistance for doing good is desirable. Religion provides us with this assistance, as many thousands and millions of people have discovered to their joy. Why, then, does he hold this remedy in contempt and regard it as dispensable?

But in another work, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 840 ff., he says that man nonetheless requires religion for morality.¹¹⁵ One must simply get used to such contradictions when dealing with the critical philosophy. <135> The following passage, it seems to me, is clear: “Without a God and without a world that is now invisible to us but to be hoped for, the magnificent ideas of morality are indeed objects of approbation and admiration *but not incentives to our purposes and our practice*, because they do not fulfill the complete goal that is natural to every rational being and is determined a priori and necessitated by this very same reason.”¹¹⁶ Even in the book quoted above, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, there is an excellent passage in which great power for promoting good moral dispositions is conceded to the contemplation of God’s works. “The contemplation (p. 289) of the profound wisdom of *the divine creation* in the smallest things and of its majesty as a whole has such power that it not only transports the mind into that retiring mood (which is called *worship*) in which human beings, as it were, annihilate themselves, but it is also, *with respect to the moral determination contained within itself, a power that so exalts the soul* that words, in contrast, even if they were those of the royal worshipper David, must fade away like empty noise, because the feeling arising from such an intuition is inexpressible.”¹¹⁷ Here Mr. Kant is

Beistandes empfänglich machen” (*Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, AA, VI, pp. 44–45).

¹¹⁵ “Die Sittlichkeit an sich selbst macht ein System aus, aber nicht die Glückseligkeit, ausser, so fern sie der Moralität genau angemessen ausgetheilet ist. Dieses aber ist nicht nur möglich in der intelligibelen Welt, unter einem weisen Urheber und Regierer. Einen solchen, samt dem Leben in einer solchen Welt, die wir als eine künftige ansehen müssen, sieht sich die Vernunft genöthigt, anzunehmen, oder die moralische Gesetze als leere Hirngespinnste anzusehen, weil der nothwendige Erfolg derselben, den dieselbe Vernunft mit ihnen verknüpft, ohne iene Voraussetzung wegfallen müßte. Daher auch iederman die moralische Gesetze als *Gebote* ansieht, welches sie aber nicht seyn könnten, wenn sie nicht a priori angemessene Folgen mit ihrer Regel verknüpften und also *Verheissungen und Drohungen* bey sich führten” (*Critik der reinen Vernunft*, AA, III, pp. 526–27, i.e., A811/B839).

¹¹⁶ “Ohne also einen Gott und eine vor uns ietzt nicht sichtbare, aber gehoffte Welt, sind die herrliche Ideen der Sittlichkeit zwar Gegenstände des Beifalls und der Bewunderung, aber nicht Triebfedern des Vorsatzes und der Ausübung, weil sie nicht den ganzen Zweck, der einem ieden vernünftigen Wesen natürlich und durch eben dieselbe reine Vernunft a priori bestimmt und nothwendig ist, erfüllen” (*Critik der reinen Vernunft*, AA, III, p. 527, i.e., A813/B841). The author of the *Father’s Letter* adds the italics and uses *Grad* in place of the original *Zweck*.

¹¹⁷ “So hat die Betrachtung der tiefen Weisheit der göttlichen Schöpfung an den kleinsten Dingen und ihrer Majestät im Großen, so wie sie zwar schon von jeher von

thinking of a *divine creation*, which he otherwise seems to doubt, and to a certain extent again gives us what he earlier wanted to take from us. He acknowledges that the contemplation of the wisdom and goodness of God as they appear in His works has a great influence *on the moral* determination of mankind; and no rational being will deny Kant the approbation due to this acknowledgment.

Man possesses dispositions to do good and to do evil; he is a rational creation but also a sensuous one. An inner voice calls to him incessantly: "You should do what is right and not do what is wrong." Perhaps he also has a good will for satisfying the demands of the moral law; however, he always gives way and does the opposite because of the intensity of his sensuous drives, and his best intentions are thwarted whenever he does not know the means of providing reason <136> mastery over the violence of his desires. He will always have to confess to himself: *Video meliora proboque; deteriora sequor* ["I see the better way and approve it, but I follow the worse way"].¹¹⁸ If he does not believe in God, a higher judge who sees into what is hidden, if he does not believe in a retributive order where the evil that remains unrequited here will be punished, then he only does as much good as seems necessary to him for making his way in the world respectably. But he will not hesitate for a moment to do whatever pleases him or brings him a temporary advantage if he can only hope with some probability that it will not see the light of day, that he need not fear either being reviled or being punished. His moral feeling will indeed awaken from time to time; he will not be able to conceal from himself that he has reason to be ashamed of himself because of his outrageous transgressions against the moral law. But soon the voice of his sensuous desires and intense passions will again drown out the voice of reason and conscience; he will always remain the evil person that he has been all along. Such a frame of mind will make this thought quite welcome to him: "There is no God, no other life. After your death you have as little to fear as you have to hope." He will become more and more hardened in his wicked ways and take it to be the height of wisdom to commit his injustices and perform his bad actions so secretly that he does not lose his reputation for being an honest man. He will know how to give his vices a tinge of virtue and in his heart will laugh at those who allow themselves to be cheated by him. If his misdeeds are discovered, or if he comes to feel the consequences of his trespasses so acutely that he is at his wit's end and knows not what to do, then

Menschen hat erkannt werden können, in neueren Zeiten aber zum höchsten Bewundern erweitert worden ist, eine solche Kraft, das Gemüth nicht allein in diejenige dahin sinkende, den Menschen gleichsam in seinen eigenen Augen vernichtende Stimmung (die man *Anbetung* nennt), zu versetzen, sondern es ist auch, in Rücksicht auf seine eigene moralische Bestimmung, darin eine so seelenerhebende Kraft, daß dagegen Worte, wenn sie auch die des königlichen Beters *David* (der von allen jenen Wundern wenig wußte), wären, wie leerer Schall verschwinden müssen, weil das Gefühl aus einer solchen Anschauung unaussprechlich ist" (*Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, AA, VI, p. 197).

¹¹⁸ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VII, 20–21.

a dagger becomes his final consolation, his last refuge. This is the story of many *practical* atheists; unfortunately, there is no small number of them to be found even among those who profess to be Christians. But now Professor Fichte and Rector Forberg are even cultivating *theoretical* atheists, who will then not fail to put their theory into practice. And how will it look to posterity if important official positions in the government, the churches, and the schools are occupied by atheists at some point in the future?

But how good it would be for human society if all people, or only most people, had religion! A person who really has religion, who is convinced by its doctrines and strives to apply them to his heart and his life, will not merely abstain from the coarse vices that catch everyone's eye. He will never intentionally and knowingly fail to do his duty and allow himself to perform a bad action, even if he could foresee with certainty that it would forever remain hidden from the world and thus unpunished. The active recollection of God, the author of his nature, the continually present witness to all his actions, wishes, and intentions, his highest benefactor but also his highest lawgiver and judge, to whom he owes his thanks, love, and obedience, and on whose <137> pleasure or displeasure his eternal weal or woe depends—this active recollection will strengthen his moral feeling and grant him the strength to overcome his strongest inclinations to doing evil; and if he has occasionally strayed from the path of virtue or made a mistake out of hastiness, he will soon return to doing his duty once more. But he will also strive with the sincerest zeal to discharge his duties with the most rigorous conscientiousness, to the best of his ability, and for the grateful love of God, his highest benefactor, whom he has to thank for his existence, his powers, his feeling heart, and for everything good that he has enjoyed up to now and has still to enjoy. He will be glad that his creator has assigned to him such an exalted position in the order of living beings; he will affirm his dignity and seek the greatest honor in becoming as much like the holiest and most perfect being as it is possible for him to become with regard to good dispositions, love, and beneficence. He will voluntarily sacrifice sensuous pleasure, human approbation, and temporary advantage as soon as duty asks it of him, because the tranquility of his conscience and the approbation of the eternal being will be infinitely more valuable to him than all the goods and treasures of the earth, and because the certain hope that in a better world he will gather the fruits of his noble efforts will never let him tire of the good. Suffering and adversity will never entirely quash his spirit. In dark hours he will console himself once more with the thought that his fate stands under the guidance of a most wise and good providence; that all things must conduce to the benefit of those who love God and do the right thing; that what is here will be only a beginning, but what is there will be a consummation; and that virtue and happiness will be brought into the desired harmony.

However, I do not intend to pursue these thoughts any further. I want to recommend a short book to you, dear Ferdinand, a book that all young people should have in their hands, should read and re-read, and the contents of which they should give the most thoughtful consideration. It is entitled *Religion: A*

Human Affair and is by J. J. Spalding. (2nd revised edition, Berlin, 1798.)¹¹⁹ As for theoretical matters, however, I recommend Jerusalem's *Reflections on the Principal Truths of Natural Religion*, Part I, and Mr. Samuel Reimar's *Essays on the Principal Truths of Natural Religion*.¹²⁰

In these three works you will find more thorough instruction on these topics than you will find in all of the Kantian and Fichtean writings. In general, I would advise you not to engage in the study of the critical philosophy, and certainly not <138> the Fichtean so-called philosophy. You can put your time to much better use and spare yourself the vexation of working through obscure, meaningless sophistries without the slightest gain in the enlightenment of your understanding and the ennoblement of your heart. I must candidly confess to you that I prophesied right from the beginning that the critical philosophy would not last long. My conjecture has come partly true already. For the various factions, who violently take the field against one another, threaten to destroy one another; and following the great Fichte's example, they will annihilate one another as soon as they possibly can. In the end most of them will leave their utopia and return again to the land of sound reason and common sense, and then everything will gradually improve. I hope from the bottom of my heart that this will happen.

Your faithful father,

G ...

¹¹⁹ Spalding, *Religion, eine Angelegenheit des Menschen* (Berlin, 1798).

¹²⁰ Jerusalem, *Betrachtungen über die vornehmsten Wahrheiten der Religion* [*Reflections on the Principle Truths of Natural Religion*] (Braunschweig, 1768–79). Hermann Samuel Reimar (1694–1768), a medical doctor and enlightened deist, was made famous by Lessing's publication of his work in the *Wolfenbüttel Fragmente* (1774–78). He wrote *Die vornehmsten Wahrheiten der natürlichen Religion in zehn Abhandlung* [*Essays on the Principal Truths of Religion*] (Hamburg, 1754).

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Chapter 4

Friedrich August: “Saxon Letter of Requisition to the Weimar Court” *and* Karl August: “Weimar Rescript to the University of Jena”

Commentary

Shortly after the publication of J. G. Fichte’s “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance” and F. K. Forberg’s “Development of the Concept of Religion” in the *Philosophisches Journal*,¹ and shortly after the publication of the anonymous *A Father’s Letter to his Student Son about Fichte’s and Forberg’s Atheism*,² members of the Dresden High Consistory approached Elector Friedrich August with a letter protesting the atheistic content of Forberg’s essay, questioning the open expression of irreligious principles in the schools, and requesting confiscation of the *Philosophisches Journal*.³

Friedrich August responded to the High Consistory’s grievance by confiscating the offending issue of the *Philosophisches Journal*.⁴ He also sent requisition letters

¹ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 21–29 (GA, I, 5, pp. 347–57) and “Development of the Concept of Religion,” pp. 37–47 (SFA, pp. 37–58); *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten* Vol. VIII, No. 1, (Jena/Leipzig: Gabler, 1798).

² “A Father’s Letter to his Student Son about Fichte’s and Forberg’s Atheism,” pp. 57–75 (GA, I, 6, pp. 121–38).

³ “Dresdner Oberkonsistorium an Friedrich August III, von Sachsen” [“Dresden High Consistory to Friedrich August III of Saxony”] of 29 October 1798 (GA, 6, pp. 298–301, No. 681a). This letter was signed by Heinrich Ferdinand von Zedtwitz (1746–1812), President of the High Consistory in Dresden; Karl Friedrich Behrisch, Councilor of the High Consistory in Dresden; Karl Christian Tittmann (1744–1820), Evangelical theologian, Councilor of the High Consistory, and Superintendent in Dresden; Franz Volkmar Reinhard (1753–1812), theologian and High Court Preacher in Dresden; and Johann Christoph Rädler (d. 1801), Councilor of the High Consistory and Police Commissioner in Dresden. The court of Elector Friedrich August of Saxony (1750–1827) was located in Dresden.

⁴ See “Friedrich August III von Sachsen an die Universität Leipzig” [“Friedrich August III of Saxony to the University of Leipzig”] of 19 November 1798 (FG, 6, p. 308, No. 685a). This announcement—signed by Heinrich Ferdinand von Zedtwitz and by Karl Gottlieb Kühn (1748–1833), Secretary of the High Consistory in Dresden—was

to Duke Karl August and to the other patrons of the University of Jena.⁵ In the “Saxon Letter of Requisition to the Weimar Court,” Friedrich August demanded of Karl August that Forberg, Fichte, and Niethammer “be called to account and severely punished after an investigation has been conducted.”⁶ Otherwise, declared the Elector, he would be “faced with the unpleasant necessity of forbidding the children of our realm” from attending the academic institutions of Saxony–Weimar.⁷ Karl August, in turn, sent a “Weimar Rescript to the University of Jena” ordering that Fichte and Niethammer “be called to account and severely punished after an investigation has been conducted.”⁸

Friedrich August’s “Saxon Letter of Requisition to the Weimar Court” and Karl August’s “Weimar Rescript to the University of Jena” turned an informal accusation of atheism, which would ordinarily have generated a dispute involving

also published in the *National-Zeitung der Teutschen*, Issue 51, 20 December 1798, coll. 1039–40 and was reprinted in Fichte’s *Appeal to the Public* (p. 92 [GA, I, 5, p. 415]). The confiscation order was announced in the Leipzig courthouse on 26 November 1798 (FG, 2, p. 21, No. 689). Due to a misunderstanding, an announcement was made that the confiscation order applied to the first and second issues of the journal—*Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten* Vol. VIII, No. 1 and No. 2 (Jena/Leipzig: Gabler, 1798)—rather than to the first and second essays in the first issue of the journal—“Ueber den Grund unsers Glaubens an eine göttliche Weltregiurung” and “Entwicklung des Begriffs der Religion” in *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten* Vol. VIII, No. 1 (Jena/Leipzig: Gabler, 1798). Fichte became aware of the confiscation by 10 December 1798 and began making arrangements to publish an *Appeal to the Public* (pp. 92–125 [GA, I, 5, pp. 415–53]). See “Fichte an Johann Friedrich Cotta” [“Fichte to Johann Friedrich Cotta”] of 10 December 1798, GA, III, 3, p. 165, No. 396.

⁵ “Friedrich August III, Kurfürst von Sachsen” [“Saxon Letter of Requisition to the Weimar Court”] of 18 December 1798, pp. 83–84 (FG, 2, pp. 25–26, No. 697). See also, “Kurfürstl. Sächsisches Requisitions-schreiben an die Herzöge der Ernestischen Höfe” [“Saxon Requisition Letter to the Dukes of the Ernestine Courts”] of 18 December 1798 in “Acta Die Confiscirung und Censur, ingleichen die Leipziger und andere Zeitungen btr. Vol. XII 1798–1800, Loc. 55 n. 8 der Geheimen Canzley in K. S. Hauptstaats-Archiv,” p. 59. The patrons of the university were the Dukes of the Ernestine Courts: Ernst Friedrich (1724–1800), Duke of Saxony–Coburg–Saalfeld; Ernst II Ludwig (1745–1804), Duke of Saxony–Gotha–Altenburg; Georg I (1761–1803), Duke of Saxony–Meiningen; Karl August (1757–1828), Duke of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach.

⁶ “Saxon Letter of Requisition to the Weimar Court,” pp. 83–84 (FG, 2, p. 26, No. 697).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “Karl August von Sachsen–Weimar–Eisenach an die Universität Jena” [“Weimar Rescript to the University of Jena”] of 27 December 1798, p. 84 (FG, 6.1, p. 316, No. 702a). Reports of this action were sent to the other Ernestine courts on 28 December 1798. Privy Councillor Christian Gottlob (von) Voigt (1743–1819) of the Weimar Court had already notified his fellow court minister Johann Wolfgang (von) Goethe (1749–1832) that the best course of action would be for Fichte and Niethammer to be held accountable before the university (“Voigt an Goethe” of 25 December 1798, FG, 2, p. 27, No. 700).

members of the literati that had negligible consequences for the accused parties, into a legal charge of editorial and academic negligence, which initiated a controversy involving several governments that had serious consequences.⁹ The actual edicts are simple and succinct. In his “Saxon Letter of Requisition to the Weimar Court,” Friedrich August raises three concerns. Firstly, the editors Fichte and Niethammer published essays by the authors Fichte and Forberg that concede “principles that are incompatible with the Christian religion, and indeed even with natural religion, and that are openly intended to disseminate atheism.”¹⁰ Secondly, instructors are teaching such principles to “youth in the universities and schools.”¹¹ Thirdly, unbelief, irreligion, and atheism undermine “the common weal” and “the stability of the state.”¹² Since the destructive forces at work in one realm affect its neighbors, Friedrich August must insist that Fichte, Forberg, and Niethammer be punished, that a decree be issued dissuading other instructors from following their example, and that measures be taken to end similar behavior in the *Gymnasien*, schools, and university. Karl August, in the “Weimar Rescript to the University of Jena,” simply refers the representatives of the university to the Elector’s requisition letter, neither explicitly confirming nor denying the accusation that Fichte and Forberg promoted atheism in their essays but emphasizing the fear that students might have been exposed to the ideas contained in those essays.¹³ Most importantly, he reinforces Friedrich August’s main directive: Fichte and Niethammer, the editors of the *Philosophisches Journal*, must be held responsible for their actions and must be punished and investigated.¹⁴ Both Friedrich August and Karl August seem unworried that the demanded investigation should determine the guilt or

⁹ The *Father’s Letter* initiated the charge of atheism and brought Fichte’s and Forberg’s essays to the attention of the High Consistory in Dresden; Friedrich August’s and Karl August’s decrees sanctioned the charge and brought Fichte and Niethammer under the authority of the courts.

¹⁰ “Saxon Requisition Letter to the Weimar Court,” pp. 83–84 (FG, 2, p. 25).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² “Saxon Letter of Requisition to the Weimar Court,” pp. 83–84 (FG, 2, p. 25). Friedrich August says that recent experience demonstrates the connection between unbelief and social or civil disorder. Perhaps he refers to the connection between the principles of the French Enlightenment and the French Revolution, or perhaps he indicates the connection between the principles of “liberty and equality” and the founding of the Republic of Mainz, which was dissolved after the Siege of Mainz that Karl August witnessed in 1793.

¹³ “Weimar Rescript to the University of Jena,” p. 84 (FG, 6.1, p. 316, No. 702a).

¹⁴ “Weimar Rescript to the University of Jena,” p. 84 (FG, 6.1, p. 316, No. 702a) and “Saxon Requisition Letter to the Weimar Court,” pp. 83–84 (FG, 2, p. 26, No. 697). Note that Karl August does not demand punishment or investigation of Forberg, who had once been a *Dozent* at the University of Jena, because Forberg is a rector in Saalfeld, which is not a part of Saxony–Weimar, and thus is neither an employee of the university nor a subject of Karl August.

innocence of the accused parties, who must simply “be called to account and severely punished.”¹⁵

Had Karl August not indulged his “cousin” the Elector by issuing the “Weimar Rescript to the University of Jena,” Friedrich August and the High Consistory would have been tested in doing anything to Fichte and Niethammer other than confiscating the *Philosophisches Journal* in Electoral Saxony, because the Elector of Saxony had little or no authority over activities in Ducal Saxony.¹⁶ Indeed, the Elector had no particular authority over Karl August, or any of the other Saxon Dukes, who each ruled his own imperial estate.¹⁷ Nonetheless, Friedrich August represented a political, economic, and military power that Karl August and the other dukes could not ignore and particularly, not on account of the editors of an obscure scholarly journal (even if those editors were court-appointed faculty at the University of Jena).¹⁸ The Elector had neither mind for promoting reform, religious or otherwise, nor motive for suppressing the enlightened scholars of a foreign realm; but, as the Catholic ruler of a Protestant state, Friedrich August was advised in church matters by a Protestant privy council consisting of Lutheran and Evangelical Christians with whom he was reluctant to disagree or interfere.¹⁹ If the members of the Elector’s privy council voiced strong objections to the behavior of scholars in a neighboring realm, it behooved him to keep the peace in the Dresden Court by placating his councilors, so he prevailed upon Karl August to assist in that worthy cause by punishing Fichte, Forberg, and Niethammer. The Duke of Saxony–Weimar could not fail to gratify Friedrich August without generating uncomfortable and unnecessary friction between the Weimar and the Dresden courts.

Karl August probably enjoyed interfering with the scholarship of his faculty in Jena little more than he relished pandering to the will of the Elector in Dresden. The Duke of Saxony–Weimar enjoyed a reputation as an enlightened and liberal

¹⁵ “Weimar Rescript to the University of Jena,” p. 84 (FG, 6.1, p. 316, No. 702a) and “Saxon Letter of Requisition to the Weimar Court,” pp. 83–84 (FG, 2, p. 26, No. 697).

¹⁶ Friedrich August and Karl August refer to one another as “cousin,” but they are distant noble relatives from different lines of the royal House of Wettin: Friedrich August is from the Albertine line and Karl August is from the Ernestine line.

¹⁷ Imperial estates [*Reichsstände*] were political entities within the Holy Roman Empire of Germany that stood only under the authority of the Holy Roman Emperor. These estates included imperial free cities that were governed by the Emperor and territories that were governed by a prince, duke, king, elector, or prince-bishop. Each of the Ernestine duchies, including the Duchy of Saxony–Weimar, was an imperial estate and had sovereignty in relation to others within the Holy Roman Empire. The prince-electors, such as the Elector of Saxony, held hereditary rights to vote in the election of the Holy Roman Emperor.

¹⁸ Fichte and Niethammer were professors specially appointed by the Weimar Court.

¹⁹ In order to retain rights of inheritance of the Polish throne—Friedrich August retained the right but renounced the throne—the Saxon Elector was required to be Catholic, but the Electorate of Saxony was primarily Protestant, so the Elector was advised by a Protestant Privy Council, as a precaution by the Lutheran and Evangelical churches.

ruler.²⁰ As a youth, he had been tutored by Wieland.²¹ After assuming rule at the age of eighteen years, he established a court renowned for its social informality as well as for its intellectual and artistic culture. With luminaries such as Herder and Goethe among his top advisors, the University of Jena flourished under the Duke's patronage.²² In the year of 1799 alone, Fichte, Schelling, Schlegel, and Schiller were among the faculty of the university,²³ which profited from a tradition of political and religious moderation that went back to its founder Johann Friedrich I, a protector of Luther.²⁴ Karl August preferred to sustain this tradition, and thereby his own eminence, by permitting his advisors, such as Goethe, to hold loose reign on pacesetters, such as Fichte and Niethammer, at his University of Jena. Nonetheless, Karl August would not dismiss a threat to tarnish this star in his ducal coronet lightly. Moreover, he regarded any threat to undermine the authority of his ducal rank as a grave matter, whether the menace originated with his noble "cousin" in Dresden, his refined courtiers in Weimar, or his intellectual "pets" in Jena.

If Karl August was conceivably piqued by his relative Friedrich August's intervention in the academic affairs of Weimar, he was probably exasperated by his advisor Goethe's failure to regulate the professors' academic affairs, and he was undoubtedly incensed by his professors Fichte and Niethammer's carelessness in inciting unseemly academic affairs that provoked his relative Friedrich August's intervention.²⁵ Nonetheless, Karl August's councilor Christian Gottlob Voigt hastened to offer a solution, which Goethe endorsed.²⁶ First, Karl August would send a rescript to the University of Jena demanding that Fichte and

²⁰ Karl August, who granted a liberal constitution to Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach in 1816, won "the Just" as his epithet.

²¹ Christoph Martin Wieland (1733–1813) was a poet and writer.

²² Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) was a philosopher, philologist, and educational reformer. Johann Wolfgang (von) Goethe (1749–1832) was a poet, writer, and natural scientist. Although the University of Jena was also under the patronage of the other Dukes of the Ernestine Courts, it was located in the Duchy of Saxony–Weimar and thus fell under Karl August's special care and authority.

²³ Friedrich Wilhelm (von) Schelling (1775–1854); Friedrich (von) Schlegel (1772–1829); Friedrich (von) Schiller (1759–1805) were only a few of Fichte's distinguished colleagues at a university celebrated for attracting and producing legendary minds.

²⁴ The Saxon Elector Johann Friedrich I "the Magnanimous" (1503–1554), a protector of Martin Luther (1483–1546), founded the Academy of Jena in 1548. The Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I (1503–1564) established it as a university in 1557 (and it opened in 1558). It still exists as the Friedrich Schiller University of Jena.

²⁵ See "Karl August von Sachsen–Weimar–Eisenach an C. G. Voigt" [Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach to C. G. Voigt] of 26 December 1798, FG, 2, pp. 29–31, No. 701.

²⁶ Christian Gottlob von Voigt (1743–1819). See "Voigt an Goethe" ["Voigt to Goethe"] of 25 December 1798, FG, 2, pp. 27–29, No. 700 and "Goethe an C. G. Voigt" ["Goethe to Voigt"] of 26 (?) December 1798, FG, 2, p. 32, No. 702. See also Nicholas

Niethammer “be called to account and severely punished after an investigation has been conducted,” thereby appeasing Friedrich August and his High Consistory.²⁷ Then, after the senate, rector, and prorector of the University of Jena held the professors answerable, the Weimar Court would issue Fichte and Niethammer a cautionary reproof, thereby demonstrating Karl August’s leniency and authority.²⁸ Finally, Fichte and Niethammer would accept this admonition and would resume their stellar academic careers, thereby elevating the status of the University of Jena and its enlightened patron the Duke of Saxony–Weimar. Voigt and Goethe’s plan was a simple answer to a delicate problem. They only failed to reckon on Fichte’s noncompliance. Shortly after the confiscation of the *Philosophisches Journal*, Fichte published “Appeal to the Public,” sent his *Juridical Defense* directly to Weimar, and wrote a letter to Voigt threatening to resign if reprimanded for atheism.²⁹

Boyle’s *Goethe: the Poet and the Age*, Vol. 2: *Revolution and Renunciation* (1790–1803) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 625–31.

²⁷ “Weimar Rescript to the University of Jena,” p. 84 (FG, 6.1, p. 316, No. 702a).

²⁸ Fichte understood Voigt’s plan and his own expected role in it. See “Fichte an Karl Leonhard Reinhold” [“Fichte to Karl Leonhard Reinhold”] of 22 May 1799, GA, III, 3, pp. 354–55, 364–67, No. 448.

²⁹ On 15 January 1799, the first printing of *J. G. Fichte’s D. Phil. Doctors und Ordentlichen Professors zu Jena Appelation an das Publikum Über die durch ein Kurf. Sächs. Confiscationsrescript ihm Beigemessenen Atheistischen Aeusserungen: Eine Schrift, die Man Erst zu Lesen Bittet, ehe Man Sie Confisciert* [Appeal to the Public about the Electoral Saxon Confiscation Rescript and Associated Charge of Atheism: A Writing One is Requested to Read before Confiscating] (Jena/Leipzig/Tübingen: Gabler and Cotta, 1799) (Appeal to the Public, pp. 92–125 [GA, I, 5, pp. 415–53]) appeared. See FG, 5, p. 272 and GA, III, 3, p. 172. On 18 March 1799 Fichte sent *J. G. Fichtes als Verfassers des ersten angeklagten Aufsatzes, und Mitherausgebers des Philosophischen Journals Verantwortungsschrift* [J. G. Fichte’s Defense as an Author of the First of the Accused Essays and as a Co-editor of the *Philosophisches Journal*] (*Juridical Defense*, pp. 157–204 [GA, I, 6, pp. 26–84]) to Karl August and the other Ernestine Dukes. See FG, 5, p. 274 and GA, III, pp. 217–19. On 22 March 1799, Fichte sent the letter to Voigt (“Fichte an Christian Gottlob Voigt” [“Fichte to Christian Gottlob Voigt”] of 22 March 1799, GA, III, pp. 283–86, No. 431).

Text: “Saxon Letter of Requisition to the Weimar Court”

<FG, 2, p. 25>

Dresden, 18 December 1798

Ad Seren. Domin. Reg. Vimar³⁰

We are at your service, etc.

It has come to our attention that, in the first issue this year of the so-called *Philosophisches Journal*, edited by Professors *Fichte* and *Niethammer* of Jena, Professor *Fichte*, in the first essay, and Rector *Forberg* of Saalfeld, in the second, did not shrink from acknowledging that they have expressed principles that are incompatible with the Christian religion, and indeed even with natural religion, and that are openly intended to disseminate atheism.³¹ Cousin, you will convince yourself of this by reading the passages from both essays that we have included in the enclosure that we are submitting to you. We are certain that you will share our righteous indignation at such an outrageous undertaking by the instructors of youth in the universities and the schools. Since experience teaches well enough what sort of dismal consequences for the common weal and also in particular for the stability of the state arise from the toleration of these wretched attempts to spread the already growing propensity to unbelief even more widely and to eradicate the concepts of God and religion from the hearts of men, we cannot permit ourselves, <26> with regard to our own realm, to remain indifferent when instructors in a neighboring realm publicly and unabashedly profess such dangerous principles.³² Therefore, cousin, we must most urgently request that the authors and editors of the aforementioned essays be called to account and *severely punished* after an investigation has been conducted; and we must most urgently request that in general you issue a most emphatic decree, so that such abuses are effectively brought to a halt at your university in *Jena* (and in the *Gymnasien* and the schools), and so that we are not faced with the unpleasant necessity of forbidding the children of our realm from attending these academic institutions and depriving them, contrary to our wish, of the unmistakable advantages offered

³⁰ Ad Serenissimum Dominum Regem Vimar [His Most Serene Highness, Ruler of Weimar], namely Karl August, Duke of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach is the addressee of Friedrich August, Elector of Saxony.

³¹ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 21–29 (GA, I, 5, pp. 347–57); “Development of the Concept of Religion,” pp. 37–47 (SFA, pp. 37–58); *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten* Vol. VIII, No. 1, (Jena/Leipzig: Gabler, 1798), which Fichte and Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer (1766–1848) co-edited.

³² This “experience” would be perhaps the French Enlightenment and its influence on the French Revolution, or simply the influence of the principles of “liberty and equality” on the founding of the Republic of Mainz (17 March 1793), which was dissolved after the Siege of Mainz (23 July 1793) that Karl August witnessed.

by so many educational and instructional resources, especially those available at the University of Jena.

Text: “Weimar Rescript to the University of Jena”

<FG, 6.1, p. 316>

Weimar, 27 December 1798

We would have you take note of several things, to be found in the enclosed copy of the letter sent to us by our cousin the Elector of Saxony, which give us grounds to propose that the editors of the *Philosophisches Journal*, Professors Fichte and Niethammer, be called to account and severely punished after an investigation has been conducted.³³

Therefore, we most graciously desire that you will question the aforementioned professors as to how they justify what they have done, so much the more as we have cause to fear that the content of the essays that have appeared in print may also be a topic of their lectures, and that you will make a report of the outcome and enclose the records.

³³ The “enclosed copy” is “Saxon Letter of Requisition to the Weimar Court,” pp. 83–84 (FG, 2, pp. 25–6, Number 697). Duke Karl August calls on the University of Jena to investigate Fichte’s authorship of “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 21–29 (GA, I, 5, pp. 347–57) and Fichte and Niethammer’s editorial decision to publish Fichte’s essay and Forberg’s “Development of the Concept of Religion,” pp. 37–47 (SFA, pp. 37–58) in the *Philosophisches Journal*; and the possibility that Fichte and Niethammer have taught atheism in the classroom.

Chapter 5

J. G. Fichte: Appeal to the Public

Commentary

The “Saxon Requisition Letter to the Weimar Court” and the “Weimar Rescript to the University of Jena,” which commanded that J. G. Fichte and F. I. Niethammer, the editors of the *Philosophisches Journal*, “be called to account and severely punished,” were issued in December of 1798.¹ In January of 1799, the first public announcement of Fichte’s *Appeal to the Public* appeared in the *Intelligenzblatt* of the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*.² Similar announcements—concluding with requests that the announcements be disseminated among “upright” men of the “learned” public—were published in six other journals.³ Fichte’s *Appeal to the Public*, subtitled “A Writing One is Requested to Read Before Confiscating,” had been widely distributed to bookstores and to individual scholars throughout Germany before it was sent to Duke Karl August.⁴ By that time, H. E. G. Paulus,

¹ “Saxon Letter of Requisition to the Weimar Court,” pp. 83–84 (FG, 2, pp. 25–26, No. 697) and “Weimar Rescript to the University of Jena,” p. 84 (FG, 6.1, p. 316, No. 702a). Fichte and Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer (1766–1848) were to be accountable for their editorial decision to publish Fichte’s “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance” (pp. 21–29 [GA, I, 5, pp. 347–57]) and Forberg’s “Development of the Concept of Religion” (pp. 37–47 [SFA, pp. 37–58]) in the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten*, which they co-edited.

² “Ankündigung der Fichte’s ‘Appellation an das Publikum,’” *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, *Intelligenzblatt* No. 1 (9 January 1799), Col. 1–3 (reprinted in GA, I, 5, pp. 363–365).

³ For details regarding the publication of these announcements, see remarks by the editors of GA (GA, I, 5, p. 361).

⁴ J. G. Fichte’s *D. Phil. Doctors und Ordentlichen Professors zu Jena Appellation an das Publikum Über die durch ein Kurf. Sächs. Confiscationsrescript ihm Beigemessenen Atheistischen Aeusserungen: Eine Schrift, die Man Erst zu Lesen Bittet, ehe Man Sie Confisciert* [*Appeal to the Public about the Electoral Saxon Confiscation Rescript and Associated Charge of Atheism: A Writing One is Requested to Read before Confiscating*] (Jena/Leipzig/Tübingen: Gabler and Cotta, 1799) (*Appeal to the Public*, pp. 92–125 [GA, I, 5, pp. 415–53]) The *Appeal* appeared in print on 15 January. Fichte sent it to Duke Karl August (1757–1828) of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach on 19 January. For details regarding the chronology of the distribution of the *Appeal*, see FG, 5, pp. 272–73. The publishers, J. G. Cotta and C. E. Gabler, printed 10,000 copies of the *Appeal*, sending 150 free copies to individual scholars (along with a letter from Fichte encouraging them to distribute the pamphlet to the public). Fichte sacrificed his honorarium for the pamphlet in order for the

the prorector of the University of Jena, had sent a missive bidding Fichte to prepare a defense of his actions as an editor of the *Philosophisches Journal*, and George III, the King of England, had issued a rescript banning that journal in his German lands.⁵

The text of the *Appeal to the Public* is preceded by a reprint of the confiscation rescript originally issued by Friedrich August, the Elector of Saxony, wherein the *Philosophisches Journal* is described as containing “atheistic statements.”⁶ According to Fichte, the purpose of the *Appeal* is not to contest this ban but rather to defend himself from the accusation of atheism it contains before a learned and impartial public.⁷ He claims that duty compels him to defend himself from this charge, which he regards as “crippling and annihilating” him within the public and academic sphere, insofar as he had been “called” to study and teach philosophy and thus, as his individual moral vocation consisted in reaching his fellow man through his writings and lectures.⁸ Moreover, he indicates that the ban is the “consequence of a thoughtful and slowly and deliberately executed plan” by an “idolatrous and atheistic faction,” which has used atheism as its strawman in an attack on the freedom of conscience in general and used Fichte as its scapegoat in an attack on the philosophy of freedom—the *Wissenschaftslehre*—in particular.⁹

publishers to keep the price accessible. For details regarding the publication arrangements, and various printings and versions, of the *Appeal to the Public*, see remarks by the editors of GA (GA, I, 5, pp. 377–92). See also, Fichte’s letter to the poet and critic August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767–1845) of 16 January 1799 (GA, III, 3, pp. 174–75). For a discussion of Fichte’s marshalling of the public press to expose his position, see FSCP, pp. 402–23.

⁵ Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus (1761–1851). See Paulus’s letter to Fichte of 10 January 1799 (GA, III, 3, p. 171). Wilhelm Friedrich Georg III (1738–1820), King of Great Britain, King of Ireland, and Elector of Hannover banned the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten* VIII, No. 1 (Jena/Leipzig: Gabler, 1798) on 14 January 1799 (“Georg III: Kurhannöversches Reskript” of 14 January 1799, FG, 6, p. 320, No. 711a).

⁶ Friedrich August III, Elector of Saxony (1750–1827). The electoral rescript ordering the confiscation of the *Philosophisches Journal* was originally published in the *National-Zeitung der Teutschen*, Issue 51, 20 December 1798, Coll. 1039–40 and was reprinted in *Appeal to the Public*, p. 92 (GA, I, 5, p. 415).

⁷ *Appeal to the Public*, pp. 92, and 123–24 (GA, I, 5, pp. 416 and 450).

⁸ *Appeal*, pp. 92–96 (GA, I, 5, pp. 416–19). See also, SE, pp. 327–29 (GA, I, 5, pp. 302–303) and “Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar’s Vocation,” EPW, pp. 169–77 (GA, I, 3, pp. 50–59).

⁹ *Appeal*, pp. 92–99 (GA, I, 5, pp. 416–417 and 419–22). This “faction” consists of critics of the critical philosophy, and specifically of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, most notably various dogmatic, consequentialist, and eudaemonistic philosophers (that is, materialists who believe that happiness is the goal of morality), including various anonymous reactionary critics published in the journal *Eudämonia, oder Deutsches Volksglück*, who had long hounded Fichte with accusations of atheism and Jacobinism. For more details on the role of *Eudämonia* in the politics of the period, see Frederick Beiser, *Enlightenment*,

Likewise, he argues that the true motive for this attack is not religious or moral but rather political and philosophical: Fichte's opponents attempt to discredit him with an accusation of atheism because he opposes their political conservatism, which they are unable to defend in the public arena; and they attempt to silence him with a ban because his *Wissenschaftslehre* opposes their philosophical skepticism and dogmatism, which they are unable to defend in the philosophical arena.¹⁰

The *Wissenschaftslehre* protects religion and morality from both skepticism and dogmatism because it imposes a practical limit on theoretical reflection and because it grounds knowledge of the sensible world in faith in the supersensible world.¹¹ Skepticism results from a philosophical attitude that regards every aspect of consciousness as questionable—and indeed, within the realm of theoretical inquiry, every aspect of consciousness is questionable—but transcendental idealism is grounded in an intuition that occurs within practical activity prior to philosophizing and thus, regards some aspects of consciousness—specifically those aspects of consciousness that arise from dutiful action—as unquestionable:

[A]s soon as one raises oneself to the willing of duty simply because it is duty, to a will that has no sensible incentives but rather only the supersensible aspect of thought, and simply does it not because of the object of the act but rather because of the supersensible aspect of our disposition, thus transplanting oneself by means of one's mode of thought into another world, the spirit and certainty of this other world immediately force themselves on us irresistibly.¹²

Dogmatism arises from a practical assumption that every aspect of consciousness can be reduced to sensible intuition of the material world, but transcendental idealism shows that sensible intuition of the material world depends on intellectual intuition of the spiritual world—specifically that the theoretical authority we grant to sensible intuition is a presupposition of the practical authority we have already granted to the intellectual intuition that accompanies dutiful action: “the theoretical necessity of regarding the sensible realm as existing and the moral obligation of honoring the sensible realm as a means follow from the supersensible realm.”¹³ The *Wissenschaftslehre* shows that theoretical truth and practical goodness can both be grounded in the human moral disposition, which is itself immediately

Revolution, and Romanticism: The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought 1790–1800 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard, 1992), pp. 326–34; See also Daniel Breazeale's discussion of *Eudämonia* in IWL, pp. 103n.–104n.

¹⁰ *Appeal*, pp. 99–100 and 108–109 (GA, I, 5, pp. 423–24 and 434).

¹¹ *Appeal*, pp. 99–100 (GA, I, 5, pp. 423–24).

¹² *Appeal*, pp. 104–105 (GA, I, 5, p. 429).

¹³ *Appeal*, pp. 105–106 (GA, I, 5, p. 431). Compare to “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 25–26 (GA, I, 5, p. 353).

conjoined with belief in a spiritual world and thereby, moral consciousness secures religious belief, moral efficacy, and theoretical knowledge.¹⁴

According to Fichte, his opponents invert the relationship between the human moral disposition and religious belief: they do not understand that the human moral disposition does not depend on religious belief but rather religious belief depends on the human moral disposition.¹⁵ Since Fichte regards religious belief as implicit within the human moral disposition he must regard religion without morality as superstition and morality without religion as impossible.¹⁶ Likewise, given that Fichte grounds morality and religion in the inner certainty of conscience, he must regard outward propriety without inner righteousness as moral “perversion” and outward religiosity without inner righteousness as “pernicious superstition.”¹⁷ Moreover, Fichte will argue that only such an approach—a philosophy that acknowledges the supersensible—can account for a material content—consisting in the individual’s moral vocation—of a formal moral law.¹⁸

For Fichte, the relation between God and man is immediately given by intuition within human moral activity, but his opponents attempt to derive the relation between God and man from some concept of God’s essence in itself.¹⁹ Fichte rejects their approach on two grounds. Firstly, any concept of God that has no bearing on human morality is practically irrelevant because it cannot arise within human consciousness and thus, cannot motivate or influence practical activity.²⁰ Secondly, any concept (including a concept of God) that is not grounded in feeling is theoretically spurious because it cannot arise within human consciousness and thus, cannot initiate or influence theoretical knowledge.²¹

Fichte’s opponents perceive him as an atheist because they cannot consider the relation between a concept (including the concept of God) and a feeling (including

¹⁴ *Appeal*, pp. 100–105 (GA, I, 5, pp. 424–29).

¹⁵ *Appeal*, pp. 104–105 (GA, I, 5, p. 429).

¹⁶ *Appeal*, pp. 103–105 (GA, I, 5, pp. 428–29).

¹⁷ *Appeal*, pp. 105–106 (GA, I, 5, p. 431).

¹⁸ *Appeal*, pp. 104–105 (GA, I, 5, pp. 429–30). Compare to “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 25–26 (GA, I, 5, p. 353). Fichte’s claim is deeply and intricately rooted in his ethical theory. In essence, one may understand it as follows: The moral law makes a formal command regarding the general autonomous action in which the moral subject ought to engage, but it does not specify the material command regarding the particular autonomous actions (namely, the specific moral goal) that the moral subject ought to achieve; this material content of duty depends on the individual moral subject’s position relative to the rest of the moral world (namely, other moral subjects) and hence, can only be revealed along with the concept of the moral world that arises whenever the individual moral subject becomes aware of a specific moral obligation in a particular moment of consciousness. See SE, pp. 71 and 196 (GA, I, 5, pp. 77–79 and 189–90).

¹⁹ *Appeal*, pp. 106–108 (GA, I, 5, pp. 432–33).

²⁰ *Appeal*, pp. 107–108 (GA, I, 5, p. 433).

²¹ *Ibid.*

the feeling of the human moral disposition) except dogmatically. Transcendental idealism treats concepts (of things for consciousness) as summaries of the specific determinations of feeling. Dogmatism treats concepts (of things in themselves) as sources of the specific determinations of feeling. The idealist derives the sensible from the supersensible—from feeling—whereas the dogmatist derives the supersensible from the sensible—from substance; and thus, the idealist considers God “for consciousness” and in relation to man whereas the dogmatist attempts to conceive of God “in-himself” and apart from any relation to man.

Fichte’s opponents are philosophical dogmatists. They condemn him as an atheist because he affirms an idealistic concept of God against the dogmatic concept of God rather than because he denies God. The dogmatists’ purported religious dispute with Fichte—and with all idealists—is actually a philosophical disagreement that follows from a radical difference in the two types of philosophers’ moral perspectives and ultimately, from a radical difference in their self-concepts. In his philosophizing, the dogmatist is a materialist and a determinist because, in his life, he is a eudaemonist; and he is a eudaemonist because he has no consciousness of himself as freely self-determining, or as motivated by anything other than sensible desire.²² From his perspective, the dogmatist is simply unaware of any reality other than the sensible and thus, he is unable to comprehend the affirmation of a spiritual God or to interpret that affirmation as anything other than “atheism,” the denial of a sensible God, which is the only sort of God he can imagine.²³ In his philosophizing, the idealist is an idealist because, in his life, he is a moralist; and he is a moralist because he is conscious of himself as free and self-determining, or as motivated by a moral, supersensible yearning. From his perspective, Fichte is simply aware of a supersensible reality and thus, affirms the reality of a spiritual God, which is the only sort of God he can imagine, and is unable to interpret the affirmation of a sensible God as anything other than idolatry, Godlessness, and atheism.²⁴ Since the dispute over religion between Fichte and his opponents is in fact a philosophical dispute between idealism and dogmatism, which arises from

²² *Appeal*, pp. 108–15 (GA, I, 5, pp. 434–40).

²³ *Appeal*, pp. 109–11 and 123–24 (GA, I, 5, pp. 435–36 and 450).

²⁴ *Appeal*, pp. 111–14 and 123–124 (GA, I, 5, pp. 437–39 and 450). In 1806, Fichte will revisit and expand this discussion in his lectures on ASL, wherein he introduces the notion that the scope of human consciousness is determined by human moral development, which is characterized by different types of love or desire, and that the transition from one to another progressively expanded and elevated sphere of consciousness is initiated by despair over the inadequacy of the successive objects of desire. Hence, for the individual at lower levels of moral development, all desire is a *Sehnen nach Genusse* [yearning for pleasure, or happiness] and thus, all consciousness is awareness of sensible things; whereas, for the individual at higher levels of moral development, desire includes *Sehnen nach Seligkeit* [yearning for blessedness, or beatitude] and thus, consciousness includes awareness of spiritual things. See ASL, pp. 12–13 and 151. Compare VM, pp. 24–25 (GA, I, 6, pp. 212–14) and “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 25–26 (GA I, 5, p. 353). See also, WLNm, pp. 294–95 (WLNm [K], pp. 144–45 and WLNm [H], p. 136).

a conflict between fundamental moral commitments that were determined prior to philosophical reflection, it cannot be resolved philosophically.²⁵

Regardless of their philosophical position, some people—including many who are not dogmatically, or even philosophically, inclined—would argue that Fichte's position—while intrinsically innocuous—still endangers the ethical and religious well-being of weaker, or younger, members of the populace insofar as it supplies no adequate incentive for virtue and piety. Such souls would claim that the frailty of sensible human creatures precludes submission to Fichte's severe moralism, or at least that it requires their gradual attraction to the spiritual world by means of sensible rewards and punishments. Failure to make concessions to these "facts" of human nature undermines moral, social, and religious values. Fichte addresses his closing arguments in the *Appeal* to these critics. Eudaemonism, not moralism, encourages spiritual dissoluteness, intellectual enervation, and civil irresponsibility, and particularly, in impressionable youth.²⁶ A person who has been indulged early on in sensualism will be powerless to escape its thrall and disinclined to rise to a moral-spiritual existence.²⁷ Moreover, a youth who has already become dissipated by mindless amusements will be incapable of the more arduous aspects of intellectual life and reluctant to seek those truths that defy an easy grasp.²⁸ Finally, one who has been encouraged to seek egoistic gratification from youth will be unable to find satisfaction within the relatively modest offerings of the average social station and unwilling to sacrifice immediate personal advantage for eventual communal benefit.²⁹ However, at worst the "adherents and practitioners" of Fichte's moralism would "become good-natured fanatics who deprive themselves of life's pleasures" and thereby, pose no threat to their own moral-religious or to others' social-political weal.³⁰

Fichte's *Appeal to the Public* offered a little something to put every shape of enlightened nose out of joint. Deists and fideists, material determinists and pietistic mystics, rationalist and empiricist *Popularphilosophen*: all were singled by Fichte's withering contempt. If Fichte was not already the victim of a malicious design by certain powerful factions among the *Aufklärer*, his public appeal made him the target of a vendetta by nearly every potentially enlightened soul in Germany; and if the obscurantists could not call an imperial diet, they surely wished they had access to burning brands. Cowardly, blasphemous hypocrites! Would that Father Spalding the deist could rescue Fichte from the burning pyre.³¹ Superstitious,

²⁵ *Appeal*, pp. 124–25 (GA, I, 5, pp. 444–51). Compare to *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre*: "First Introduction" and "Second Introduction," IWL, pp. 17–20 and 94–95 (GA, I, 4, pp. 193–96 and 261–62).

²⁶ *Appeal*, pp. 124–25 (GA, I, 5, pp. 451–53).

²⁷ *Appeal*, pp. 114–16 and 124–25 (GA, I, 5, pp. 440–41 and 451–53).

²⁸ *Appeal*, pp. 115–17 and 124–25 (GA, I, 5, pp. 441–42 and 451–53).

²⁹ *Appeal*, pp. 116–19 and 124–25 (GA, I, 5, pp. 442–45 and 451–53).

³⁰ *Appeal*, pp. 119–20 (GA, I, 5, p. 446).

³¹ Johann Joachim Spalding (1714–1804).

reactionary atheists! Fichte beseeches Chaplain Reinhard the rational theologian to abet him against the imperial prosecutors.³² Lascivious, mindless, idolaters! Come the noble fideist Jacobi: Shield Fichte from the Godless hordes.³³

Jacobi answered Fichte's entreaty, penning a forceful highly derogatory open letter against him.³⁴ The quasi-mystical poet and pastor Lavater wrote an equally reproachful brief.³⁵ Kant would also write a "Declaration" repudiating Fichte.³⁶ Fichte, more than he imagined, needed an apologist to mediate the *Wissenschaftslehre* before the *Aufklärer* and the critical philosophers, the pietists and the fideists. Fichte, more than he knew, needed a champion to proclaim between angered foe and baffled friend "that a man who is regarded as an atheist and an enemy of all religion [...] is quite possibly correct, and that his essay ["On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance"] is a defense of religion rather than an attack on it."³⁷ The arbitrator came; the guardian arrived: A Nathaniel "in whom was no guile."³⁸ His intercession proved too late, his vindication, too feeble; but Karl Leonhard Reinhold was also writing a "Letter to Fichte."³⁹

³² Franz Volkmar Reinhard (1753–1812) was a former professor of philosophy and theology at the University of Wittenberg, and was High Court Chaplain in Dresden and a member of the High Consistory of Electoral Saxony.

³³ Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743–1819).

³⁴ *Jacobi to Fichte*, MPW, p. 524 (GA, III, 3, pp. 222–81).

³⁵ "Johann Kaspar Lavater an Fichte" ["Johann Kaspar Lavater to Fichte"] of 7–12 February 1799 (GA, III, 3, pp. 187–93). Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741–1801).

³⁶ Kant (1724–1804) published his "Declaration" in the *Intelligencer* of the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, 28 August (1799) (AA, XII, pp. 370–71). Kant's "Declaration" is translated into English as "Declaration concerning Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*" in Arnulf Zweig's *Kant's Correspondence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) pp. 559–61. The "Declaration" was, however, published long after the attacks by Jacobi and Lavater and the defensive "Letter to Fichte" (pp. 134–43 [GA, III, 3, pp. 307–20, No. 436.I] by Karl Leonhard Reinhold (1757–1823).

³⁷ *Appeal to the Public*, pp. 121–22 (GA, I, 5, p. 448).

³⁸ In *Jacobi to Fichte*, Jacobi claimed that the idealist philosopher Reinhold was the first among the Kantians to recognize Fichte as the "messiah of speculative reason" just as Nathaniel "in whom is no guile" (John 1: 47) was the first among the Israelites to recognize Jesus as the messiah of prophecy (MPW, p. 503 [GA, III, 3, pp. 227–28]).

³⁹ On 6 April 1799, Reinhold sent K. L. Reinhold: "Letter to Fichte," Add Reference to Translation (GA, III, 3, pp. 307–20, No. 436.I).

Text: Appeal to the Public

<GA, I, 5, p. 415>

The following electoral rescript from Saxony has been issued to the universities in Leipzig and Wittenberg:

Friedrich August, by the grace of God, Elector, worthy, learned, esteemed, devout, faithful, etc.⁴⁰ We have ordered the confiscation of this publication, on account of the **atheistic** statements contained in the first and the second essay of the first issue of the **Philosophisches Journal** *pro anno* 1798, edited by **Fichte** and **Niethammer**, professors at Jena.⁴¹ And we do so because we harbor a well-founded trust in the instructors at our universities that they will make use of every opportunity given to them by their office and their influence on the young and the public in general to protect our besieged religion with vigor, zeal, and dignity, and to see to it that a rational faith in God and a living conviction of the truth of Christianity be established, disseminated, and strengthened everywhere. Thus we hereby leave such instructors among you unsuppressed. Date: Dresden, November 19, 1798.⁴²

Heinrich Ferdinand von Zedtwitz.⁴³

Karl Gottlieb Kühn.⁴⁴

<416> The first essay in the aforementioned first issue of the aforementioned journal is by me. In that essay I investigated the ground of our belief in God. I drew up propositions that are being called atheistic by a certain idolatrous and atheistic faction among us.⁴⁵ The accusation of atheism is thus directed at me.

⁴⁰ Friedrich August III, Elector of Saxony (1750–1827).

⁴¹ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 21–29 (GA, I, 5, pp. 347–57); “Development of the Concept of Religion,” pp. 37–47 (SFA, pp. 37–58); and *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten* (Fall 1799).

⁴² This announcement of the electoral rescript ordering the confiscation of the *Philosophisches Journal* was published in the *National-Zeitung der Teutschen*, Issue 51, 20 December 1798, Coll. 1039–40.

⁴³ Heinrich Ferdinand von Zedtwitz (1746–1812) was President of the High Consistory in Dresden.

⁴⁴ Karl Gottlieb Kühn (1748–1833) was Secretary of the High Consistory in Dresden.

⁴⁵ As becomes evident in the *Appeal to the Public* this “faction” consists of critics of the critical philosophy, and specifically of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, most notably various dogmatic, consequentialist, and eudaemonistic philosophers, including various anonymous critics published in the journal *Eudämonia, oder Deutsches Volksglück*, who had long hounded Fichte with accusations of atheism and Jacobinism.

In the Electorate of Saxony they probably want to ban all that I have written or merely edited.⁴⁶ There they have already banned many books and will ban even more, and it is no disgrace to be included in this group. I write and edit only for those who want to read our writings. I have no desire to force anyone. Whether or not the individuals themselves declare that they do not like my writings, or the government does so in their name, is a matter of indifference to me. If, perhaps, the individuals are not of the same opinion as their government, then they may settle this with their government. It is not my concern.

Therefore, the issue is not the ban but rather the reason for it. They make me out to be an atheist. This is my affair. A defense must ensue in response to this claim about me, and I myself must take up this defense.

Quietly tolerating an accusation of godlessness is itself one of the worst forms of godlessness. Whoever says to me, "You do not believe in God," says to me: "You are incapable of what actually singles out humanity and forms its truly distinguishing characteristic; you are no more than an animal." I disagree with him, and thus I say to him: you are not capable of judging matters of this sort and are unworthy of being instructed in how to judge them; matters of this sort are not at all accessible to you. I thereby make him into a mere animal. Since people must know that this accusation has reached my ears, I could not keep silent without displaying a contempt for my time that I do not feel and that my conscience forbids me to feel.

I could not keep silent without surrendering my entire sphere of influence. I am a professor at a university that serves several duchies, whose academy is also attended by numerous foreigners. I am a philosophical writer who believes himself able to bring some new ideas before the public. <417> All respect for what is holy would have to be completely extinguished in Germany, and our nation would really have to be what it accuses me of being, if the Christian princes who know the hope of their realms, if the mothers and fathers who know their sons to be at this academy, if everyone who has begun to study my philosophy without knowing it from its rudiments, if all of them did not shudder to their very core, if from now on people did not flee from my person and my writings as if they were infected. Whoever says to me, "You are an atheist," irreparably cripples and annihilates me if he is given credence. I am responsible for calming those who are shocked. I myself am responsible for defending my sphere of influence. Duty forbids me from patiently allowing myself to be crippled.

I could not keep silent before this accusation without exposing myself to political consequences, without exposing myself to the most conspicuous danger to my civil existence, to my freedom, perhaps to my life. This ban has not been

⁴⁶ Fichte's *Zurückforderung der Denkfreiheit von den Fürsten Europas, die sie bisher unterdrückten* (1793) [*A Reclamation of the Freedom of Thought from the Princes of Europe, Who Have Hitherto Suppressed It* (1793)] (GA, I, 1, pp. 167–92), an anonymously published polemic against the Prussian censorship laws of 1788, had been banned in the Electorate of Saxony.

pulled out of a hat, like so many other bans. It is the consequence of a thoughtful and slowly and deliberately executed plan. An honest man certainly takes no notice of secret intrigues and local gossip. But once they have caused a public incident, it is their turn to be exposed to publicity, so that every event may appear in context. Therefore, I have known quite well that for three months and more the faction that would take it to be a pious act to persecute me in that renowned seat of theirs (the one that is nearest to me) has debated that essay, has muttered, scolded, and grumbled about it—at first, less loudly, then, made bold by consent acquired in secret, more loudly and more decisively.⁴⁷ Theologians known to be enlightened and thoughtful have said that they would not know what else to think about my local authorities if I were not demoted *this time*. Others, in case they are disappointed in this hope, have spoken of imperial prosecution and the Imperial Diet.⁴⁸ The first step that they have taken on this path has been successful. They have managed to obtain a public ban on the journal and a public denunciation of the essay as atheistic. I may not hope that these heroes will content themselves with this first victory and rest on their laurels. Either I do not know them, or they will, if one does not weaken them in good time, take all of their announced steps, just as they have taken the first one, and will not rest until their goal is reached. They have exhausted all of the rage and scorn that they, armed with that ban for the present, <418> could heap on me. They have taken it too far and have publicly extended a ban intended only for the *first* issue of the journal to the *second* one as well, and by means of secret intrigues have extended it *to the entire journal*.⁴⁹ Vanini took a piece of straw from the funeral pyre on which he was about to be burned as an atheist and said: “Were I so unfortunate to doubt the existence of God, this piece of straw would persuade me.”⁵⁰ Poor Vanini, that you could not speak openly before

⁴⁷ The “renowned seat” is Weimar.

⁴⁸ The *Reichstag*, or Imperial Diet, was the “parliament” or assembly of estates of the Holy Roman Empire. It is doubtful that the Imperial Diet would have been convened to address Fichte’s alleged atheism. Nonetheless, Friedrich August III, Elector of Saxony, had requested universal compliance with the confiscation of the *Philosophisches Journal* from Ducal Saxony in his “Kurfürstl. Sächsisches Requisitions-schreiben an die Herzöge der Ernestischen Höfe vom 18 December 1798” [“Electoral Saxon Requisition Letter to the Dukes of the Ernestine Courts” of 18 December 1798] (“Acta Die Confiscirung und Censur, ingleichen die Leipziger und andere Zeitungen btr. Vol. XII 1798–1800, Loc. 55 n. 8 der Geheimen Canzley in K. S. Hauptstaats-Archiv,” p. 59). Consequently, Fichte’s suggestion that some people hoped to see him tried and punished by the entire Holy Roman Empire is more a flamboyant exaggeration than a paranoid self-aggrandizement.

⁴⁹ The second issue of the *Philosophisches Journal*, which contained an essay by Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854) on revelation and popular education, was not mentioned in the original electoral rescript. It was almost banned erroneously on 26 November 1798. An announcement of the ban was printed in *Der National-Zeitung der Teutschen*, Issue 50, 13 December 1798, Coll. 1011–1013.

⁵⁰ Giulio Cesare—originally Lucilio—Vanini (1585–1619) was an outspoken Italian priest condemned to the stake for atheism. His tongue was torn out, he was strangled, his

you came to that spot! I will do so before my funeral pyre is built. As long as I can still hope to find a hearing, I will speak as openly, as heatedly, as forcefully as I can. Duty bids me do this. I will tranquilly await whatever effect it will have. My faith gives me this tranquility.

I am entirely indifferent to any personal consequences. I know and feel with heart-stirring force that my cause is a good cause, but that nothing concerns me personally. If I lose this fight, then I have arrived too early, and it is God's will that I should be defeated. He has a number of servants, and when His time comes, He will, without any doubt, let this cause, which is His own cause, be victorious. When He will do this, and whether or not He will do it through me or someone else, of that I know nothing and am supposed to know nothing. I only know that I must also defend my person as long as I can, because *for me* the victory of this good cause is certainly also connected with the activity of this person. But even if I could know for certain that I am destined to increase by one more the innumerable victims who have already fallen on behalf of the truth, yet I would still have to summon my last ounce of strength in order to help bring before the public the principles that could at least protect and save those who will defend the same cause after me. From beneath the remains of <419> those martyred for the truth there has sprouted, from time immemorial, a higher freedom and safeguard of the truth. In every age, the greater mass of people are ignorant, blind, and stubbornly set against new teachings. Every age would imitate in all respects the manner in which preceding ages opposed those who would challenge the old errors if people did not occasionally feel ashamed about doing what they have just openly condemned in their ancestors. Jesus' contemporaries erected monuments to the prophets and said: "Had they come in our days, we would not have killed them."⁵¹ Thus acts every age, up to this moment, with respect to the martyrs of the preceding ages. Every age is completely correct about the fact that it would not persecute *these* people if they were to re-appear, because these people have become for the most part its infallible saints. They now persecute only those who will not acknowledge that their saints are infallible. But one must treat them justly, so that they gradually learn to act with greater consideration and decency.

If it was ever necessary to bring before the public such principles for the defense of religious freedom and freedom of conscience, it is now an urgent necessity. If we do not now, immediately, defend our freedom of thought, it might soon be too late. The free drive for knowledge is perhaps no more suppressed than it was of old, here and there, just as the momentary mood dictated, but it is done on the

body burned and his ashes scattered on 9 February 1619. Philosophical legend suggests that Vanini did once pluck a leaf of grass—but not from his pyre—and say "*et levis est cespes qui probet esse Deum.*"

⁵¹ Fichte is alluding to the biblical passage "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchers of the righteous, and say, if we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets" (Matthew 23: 29–30).

basis of principles and proceeds systematically. Who among my readers has not heard the following principle, precipitated by the misfortune of our time, asserted, preached, and emphasized? “Freedom to think for oneself endangers the stability of the state. Independent thought is the source of all civil unrest. Here, here is the place where the evil can be torn out at the root. The only infallible truth beyond which no human mind can go, which requires no further examination, explication, or discussion, has long been in readiness; it lies stored in certain confessions of faith. The business of independent thought was long ago concluded for the human race. One must speak in this fashion. All mental activity must be restricted to this: to learn this truth by heart, to repeat it unchanged, and always to repeat it. Then thrones hold steady, altars do not sway, and not a single Heller is lost from the surplice-fees.” They now prepare themselves more earnestly than before to act on this principle. To begin with, in order to startle the indifference of our age, a big word that duly fills the ears, that of “atheism,” had to be chosen, and the public had to be presented with the seldom seen spectacle of several atheists. As if on cue, I fell directly into their hands with my essay. Let them first dispose of me, and then they will gradually make even more headway. And before a decade passes, no smaller fuss will be made over the smallest deviation from the smallest phrase in the *Formula concordiae* than is now made over my alleged atheism.⁵²

Therefore, there could indeed be readers, well-meaning yet certainly unfamiliar with the human heart and their own age, or careless and incapable of serious reflection, who would take up this essay of mine and let it go with the objection that I give too much importance to a trivial matter and raise a great uproar over little or nothing. Leaving aside the fact that, regardless of the circumstances, the accusation of atheism may absolutely not be treated as trivial, the circumstances this time are in fact such that my future influence as a whole, my security as a citizen, and the universal freedom of conscience are in danger. Even now—I write this twenty-one days after the issue of the ban—a disapproving voice, without my involvement or knowledge, has risen up against my accusers.⁵³ Even if I remained silent, several more of them would be heard, for a public, solemn accusation of

⁵² The *Formula concordiae*, or *Formula of Concord*, was the Lutheran confession of faith defined by a group of theologians and clergy at the commission of August I, Elector of Saxony, in 1576 in an effort to reconcile divisions between various theological positions. It is one of the main bases of Lutheran orthodoxy.

⁵³ Fichte wrote the *Appeal to the Public* sometime in mid-December. The “disapproving voice” was the anonymous author of *Etwas zur Antwort auf das Schreiben eines Vaters an seinen studierenden Sohn über den Fichteschen und Forbergschen Atheismus: Nebst Andeutungen der Harmonie einiger religiösen Grundsätze Sokrates, Antonins, Jesus, Luthers, Kants, Fichtes und Forbergs* [*Something in Answer to A Father’s Letter to his Student Son about Fichte’s and Forberg’s Atheism: Including Suggestions about the Harmony between the Religious Principles of Socrates, Anthonius, Jesus, Luther, Kant, Fichte, and Forberg*] (Jena/Leipzig: Gabler, 1799). This pamphlet is described by its author as “written in November 1798.” Fichte includes an excerpt from it in Appendix E to his *Juridical Defense* (GA, I, 6, p. 144).

atheism, emanating from a high government institution, is too outrageous, too appalling. The occasion for it is so obviously and so entirely groundless—and there are still copies of my essay that remain unconfiscated—that no one else in all of Germany could reconcile the essay with the rescript that was issued because of it. Consequently, my opponents will soon be forced to defend themselves, to continue to intrigue and conspire, to strengthen in secret their faction against me, to incite powerful people against me, to twist my words until they say what they wished I had said, to fabricate and spread lies about me. In short, they will make me completely disreputable, so that they <421> will appear slightly more reputable next to me. Or, even if it were possible that no one among all of the free thinkers said a word on my behalf (something that, in honor of my time, I consider impossible) and that my opponents would be provoked no further from without in this fashion; if it were possible (something that I consider even more impossible) that they themselves would be stimulated no further from within by their ardent zeal and satisfied themselves in this matter with the triumph that has been handed to them: what, then, should become of our mutual relationship in the future? I have merely hinted at my principles regarding religion in the essay that has so incensed my opponents against me. It was an occasional essay that I believed had to accompany the work of another philosophical writer that was printed right after it.⁵⁴ I must discuss my principles even further, ground them even more deeply, and apply them in an even more far-reaching manner. Can they remain silent during this undertaking, without openly admitting their earlier lies? Must they not, once I have not been warned off by the mild measure (as they like to call it) that is currently directed at me, once I have not allowed their tender corrective to take effect with me, must they not necessarily squeeze harder, in order to appear consistent, and take all the steps, one after the other, that they have already announced? Therefore, I would have to be completely silent about matters of this sort in the public press if I should have any peace from them. But only about matters of this sort? One would be very much mistaken if one believed that they are only concerned with my alleged atheism. They are concerned with my entire philosophy, with the entirety of modern philosophy; and they are entirely correct about this and show that they know their true enemy well. This supposed atheism is only a pretext. They have betrayed their secret through the heartfelt joy with which they have cheerfully cried out: “Now, thank God, one finally sees clearly what modern philosophy leads to—to pure atheism!” My philosophy, my entire mode of thought is characterized by them in all its parts as a doctrine that necessarily leads to atheism; and, consequently, they cannot treat a single branch of it differently from all the others. They are obliged by their position to condemn whatever I may say. Therefore, I would have to publish absolutely nothing else in order to be at peace with them. But is the press the only way in which I communicate my convictions? Am I not also an academic lecturer? Oh, they have <422> not let

⁵⁴ Fichte means “Development of the Concept of Religion,” pp. 37–47 (SFA, pp. 37–58).

this slip by, for the oft-heard litany is still ringing in my ears: “It is deplorable how this tempter drags so many young people with him into the abyss of corruption!”⁵⁵ After it becomes known that they are aware that I am an academic lecturer, seeing how certain it is that people will believe that they are driven to my persecution by their zeal to do something for the glory of God and the welfare of their fellow-man, they cannot rest until my voice is just as silent at the lectern as in public writings. But one also remains in society. By means of discussions, admittedly, one can no longer tempt souls in great numbers, but one can still tempt them; and their official guardians apply themselves to saving all of them. Consequently, if they are consistent, they must necessarily expel me from human society, and only then will they be able to rest, in a rational fashion, in accordance with their principles. Therefore, even if the most unexpected confluence of circumstances and an even less expected mildness in my opponents made it possible for them to forgive the past, their honor, their dignity, their entire outward reputation, and the possibility that they are deceiving themselves are inextricably bound up with forgiving me only on condition that I disappear entirely from the literary stage and from society.⁵⁶ To be on such a footing with a large, bold, politically effective faction—who would regard this as minor, as an incident in the face of which one could be calm and unmoved?

Who will regard my prediction and apprehension as exaggerated once he remembers for only a moment the experience of earlier times? Even then one did not start, as in older times, with burning someone to death, or, as in modern times, with expelling someone from office, home, and court by means of imperial prosecution. The first step was always confiscation orders, and seldom so pointed as the one issued against our journal: the essay was called *atheistic* and the sale thereof forbidden with a fine and a prison sentence.⁵⁷ I say a prison sentence. If the unfortunate martyrs for the truth had not handled the initial attacks of their opponents so indifferently, if they had not expected from them what one must never expect from enemies of the truth—humanity and reason—matters would

⁵⁵ For example, *A Father's Letter to his Student Son about Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism*, pp. 57–58 and 64–66 (GA, I, 6, pp. 121–22 and 128–29).

⁵⁶ The phrase “the possibility that they are deceiving themselves” [“die Möglichkeit ihrer innern Selbsttäuschung”] or more literally, “the possibility of their inner self-deception,” may seem at odds with the rest of the sentence. Fichte suggests that his opponents would either need to act against their conscience by permitting the dissemination of pernicious, anti-religious doctrines or admit that their attack was motivated by philosophical rivalries having little or nothing to do with religion and the public weal. See below Fichte's claim that his adversaries prefer to ban his writings rather than refute them (*Appeal*, pp. 108–109 [GA, I, 5, p. 434]).

⁵⁷ The announcement of the ban of the first and second Issues of the *Philosophisches Journal* published on pages 548–49 of the *Sächsische Provinzialblätter* of December 1798 states that the ban is to be violated “on pain of a heavy fine” [“bei schwerer Strafe”] or alternatively, “on pain of a grave punishment.”

probably not have gone as far as they did with very many of them. <423> *Bahrdr*, who was otherwise scarcely worthy of suffering for the truth, ruined himself through his carelessness.⁵⁸ *Lessing*, who was under the protection of a generous and enlightened prince, powerfully resisted his merciless accuser *Götz*, who also spoke of imperial prosecution.⁵⁹

Therefore, I must defend myself while there is still time, and I will defend myself.

I.

My doctrine is atheistic, they say. What, then, does this atheistic doctrine actually contain, and what is asserted in my notorious essay on religion and belief in God?⁶⁰

Strictly speaking, I need do nothing else in my defense than to let that essay be printed once again and ask for an attentive reading of it. It contains its defense entirely within itself, and even now I can add nothing new to it. I will merely say in another way what was already said there, because here I speak to a mixed audience, whereas in the journal I spoke to a philosophical audience.

What is true? What is good? Answering these questions, which must be the aim of every philosophical system, is also the goal of my system. This system asserts, first and foremost, in opposition to those systems that deny all that is certain in human cognition, that there is something absolutely true and good. It shows, in opposition to those systems that wish to explain all of our cognition in terms of the constitution of things existing independently of us, that things exist for us only insofar as we are conscious of them, and that, consequently, with our explanation of consciousness we can never arrive at things that exist independently of us. It asserts—and its essence consists of this—that through the <424> fundamental character and original predisposition of humanity in general

⁵⁸ Karl Friedrich Bahrdr (1741–1792) was a biblical philologist who studied under Christian August Crusius (1751–75). He squandered several opportunities to teach and preach in Leipzig, Giessen, and Halle, living a dissolute life fraught with trouble until 1789, when he was sentenced to a year in prison for writing an anonymous satire on the Prussian religious edict of 1788.

⁵⁹ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781), the great *Aufklärer*, published a fragment by Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768) about the historical Jesus in the *Wolfenbüttel Fragmente* (1774–78), which provoked a conflict with Götz, or Johann Melchior Goeze (1717–1786), an orthodox Lutheran pastor. Lessing responded with a defense of religious freedom in *Anti-Goeze* (1778). Lessing was under the protection of Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand (1766–1806), Duke of Braunschweig–Lüneburg and hereditary Prince of Braunschweig–Wolfenbüttel–Bevern.

⁶⁰ Fichte's "doctrine" would be his entire *Wissenschaftslehre* and Fichte's lectures and writings on religion in particular. His "notorious essay" is "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," pp. 21–29 (GA, I, 5, pp. 347–57).

there is established a determinate mode of thought, which is indeed not necessarily found in actuality in every individual, and cannot even be demonstrated to him, but can simply be imputed to everyone. There is something that halts and ties down the free flight of thought, something at which every human being must pause, something that lies in our own nature but outside of thought itself. With regard to thought, skepticism is completely correct about the absolute inexorability of speculation when speculation is practiced in accordance with its own laws. The matter has been stated in my notorious essay in the following fashion (page 9): “Here (in the consciousness of my moral vocation) lies that which sets its limits on the otherwise untamed flight of reasoning, that which binds the spirit because it binds the heart. Here is the point that unites thinking and willing as one and brings harmony into my being. I could go further, simply for the sake of going further, if I wanted to set myself in contradiction with myself, for there is no immanent limit in reasoning itself. It goes forth freely *in infinitum* and must be able to do so, for I am free in all of the ways in which I express myself; and only I myself, by means of the will, can set a limit to myself.”⁶¹

Our philosophy seeks that which binds our free thought, that which transforms our representation into a cognition, and that which spreads certainty throughout the entire sphere of our consciousness. With regard to the preceding, it finds the following.

Now and then, amid the transactions and joys of life, a sigh escapes from the breast of every human being who is not entirely ignoble: “Such a life cannot possibly be my true vocation, there must, oh, there must be another entirely different lot for me!” A holy man says the following with singular intensity: “Even creation yearns along with us and is always sighing to be freed of servitude to vanity, to which it is subjected against its will.”⁶² Say it however one wishes, this weariness with the transitory, this yearning for something higher, better, and unchanging, lies indelibly in the mind of mankind. Just as indelibly a voice in it says that something is a duty and an obligation, and that solely because it is an obligation, it must be done. “Let things fare with me however they will,” says, then, the person who has suffered a setback, “I will do my duty so that I may be accused of nothing.” Through this outlook alone is he again able to bear the human hustle and bustle that has become disgusting to him. “Duty now demands,” he says to himself, “that I go on with this life and deal vigorously and cheerfully with whatever now happens to me; and even though life for its own sake has very little value for me, it is holy to me on account of duty.”

⁶¹ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 23–24 (GA, I, 5, p. 351). Fichte adds the parenthetical remark to this quotation.

⁶² Fichte is alluding to the biblical passage: “For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Romans 8: 19–22).

The disposition found in the consciousness of our resolution to perform our obligation because it is an obligation indicates to us that marvelous yearning. By fulfilling a duty simply for its own sake, one raises oneself above all sensible impulses, purposes, and final goals. One does something not so that this or that occurs in the world as a result, but merely and solely so that it happens, and so that obedience to the voice of our inner nature is realized. That yearning is certainly not satisfied by this consciousness, yet the painful feeling with which it expressed itself is removed; one does not obtain the fulfillment of one's striving but rather calm and inner peace. That yearning demands liberation from the bonds of sensibility in general. It demands liberation in our entire condition, from which the performance of duty, as a consequence of our acting, really liberates us. An entirely new world opens itself to us by means of that predisposition in our nature. Without it, all of the thoughts and endeavors of the human heart are aimed solely at sensible gratification, or at best at the dominance of our unconditioned willfulness; consequently, always at something given in outer experience and dependent on chance. By means of it, we attain a higher existence that is independent of nature in its entirety and is grounded solely in ourselves. By means of it, we enter into an order that is quite fittingly called a supersensible one.

To that consciousness of having done our duty for its own sake is immediately connected a new one: the unshakeable confidence that, by means of the liberation of one's *will* from sensibility, one at least becomes worthy of liberation from sensibility with respect to one's *entire condition*, and that once one has done only what depended on us, what is not in our power will gradually reveal itself on its own.

This consciousness of a higher vocation raised above all sensibility, this consciousness of what is absolutely in conformity with duty, this consciousness of a necessary connection of the fulfillment of the latter with the worthiness for and the gradual attainment of the former—a consciousness that every cultured human being will find in himself—cannot emerge from any experience, for it raises us above all experience. We must find it in that being of ours that is independent of all experience; we must know it immediately because we know ourselves. It is as certain as our own existence and depends on nothing but this existence itself.

<426> This consciousness, which in introspection appears, as it were, dismantled, each of the aforementioned pieces appearing in us individually as a particular fact, is posited within a necessary interconnection by my system. It is, this system shows, the goal of our entire existence and all of our acting—a goal that is indeed never to be reached but is to be unceasingly promoted—that rational being become absolutely and entirely free, self-sufficient, and independent of everything that is not itself reason. Reason should satisfy itself. This vocation of ours proclaims itself to us precisely through that yearning that is not to be satisfied with any finite good. We should simply, we must simply posit this goal if we wish to remain true to ourselves. What we for our own part have to do in order to promote this goal, and to what extent its attainment depends on us, is likewise taught us by the inner voice of conscience, which immediately commands and is inextinguishable

and infallible. It is conscience, in every situation in life, that decisively tells us, if only we consult it, what our duty in this situation is, that is, what we have to contribute in this situation in order to promote the goal of reason as a whole. We must simply will that goal; this is the overarching unalterable determination of our will. The particular duty determined by time and circumstance, although it appears in common consciousness as something immediate, we will only as a part of and means to that final goal, as is proven in a thorough philosophical investigation of consciousness in its entirety. The unshakeable confidence of the person who does the right thing for the sake of conscience, the unshakeable confidence that he approaches the fulfillment of his goal, is hereby explained as well. He irresistibly feels, even if he has not developed it into a distinct thought, that that disposition is precisely the presupposition of and the means to his satisfaction and liberation, and that he enters thereby into the order that his inextinguishable yearning requires. That absolute self-sufficiency of reason, that complete liberation from all dependency, I will call *beatitude*. I expressly want what I have described—and certainly not some pleasure of whatever kind it may be—to be understood by means of that term.

And now the aforementioned interconnection can be described as follows: I necessarily will my beatitude, not as a pleasurable state, but as the state befitting my dignity; not because I desire beatitude, but rather because a rational being deserves it; and I cannot give up this demand without surrendering myself, without surrendering my true being and regarding myself as an empty semblance and illusion. My conscience shows me that the single yet infallible <427> means to beatitude is the fulfillment of duty, not only that whatever is in conformity to duty generally comes to pass, but rather that it happens solely for duty's sake. Once again, I cannot doubt this holy dispensation, which is immediately laid down in my inner nature, without surrendering myself, regardless of the fact that I definitely do not comprehend or need to comprehend how and in what manner that dutiful disposition might lead me to my necessary goal. In short, it is so; it is simply so; it is so without any proof. I know it immediately, as certainly as I know anything, and as certainly as I know myself. It forces on me the unshakeable belief that there is a rule and a fixed order—I, a mortal being, am necessitated to think the supersensible by means of concepts that have been derived from the sensible world—that there is a fixed order in accordance with which the purely moral mode of thought necessarily makes for beatitude, just as the sensible and carnal one inevitably destroys all beatitude; an order that is inexplicable to me and directly opposed to the order in the sensible world that alone is known to me (because in the latter the result depends on *what* occurs; in the former, the result depends on *the disposition on account of which* it occurs); an order in which all sensible beings work collectively toward the morality of all and thereby toward the beatitude of all; an order of which I myself am a member, and from which it follows that I stand precisely at this point in the system of the whole, that I enter precisely into the situation in which it becomes a duty to act in this or that fashion without quibbling about the results, because results are not at all reckoned on in

the visible world, but rather in the invisible and eternal world, results which, by means of that order, according to the infallible pronouncement found in my inner nature, can be nothing but beatific. “By taking hold of that goal (of beatitude) posited by my own being,” as I say about it in my notorious essay (page 10), “and turning it into the goal of my real action, I simultaneously posit as possible the accomplishing of that very goal through real action. Both propositions are identical, for ‘I intend something as a goal for myself’ means ‘I posit it as real at some future time’. Possibility, however, is necessarily posited alongside reality. If I do not wish to deny my own being, I must intend the former, my accomplishing that goal; consequently, I must also assume the latter, its ability to be accomplished. Indeed, here it is not a case of there being first one thing and then a second one, but rather of there being an absolute unity. In fact, the two are not two acts but rather one and the same indivisible act of the mind.”⁶³

<428> It is absolutely necessary and is the essential element in religion that the man who affirms the dignity of his reason relies on the belief in this moral world order (this supersensible, divine realm that is infinitely superior to all that is transitory); takes each of his duties, considered as a decree of that order, and every result thereof, as good, i.e., as beatifying; and happily submits himself to that order. That he summarizes (and focuses on) the various relations of that order to himself and to his acting (when he has to speak thereof with others) by means of the concept of an existing being (which he perhaps calls God) is the consequence of the finitude of his understanding; but doing so is harmless if he only uses that concept for nothing more than this summarizing of the relationships of a supersensible world to himself, relationships that are immediately revealed to him in his inner nature. He then does nothing other than what we all do when we summarize certain determinations of feeling by means of the concept of a coldness or warmth existing outside of us, regardless of the fact that no rational being will assert that such a warmth or coldness exists for him independently of these relations to feeling. The relation of those objects of thought to our sensible feeling, the relation of a supernatural world-order to our moral feeling—in both cases the relation comes first and is simply immediate; the concept arises later and is mediated by what comes first. In the first case, it is mental weakness—in the second case, a weakness of the heart—to alter the relationship and attempt to make the feeling dependent on the concept. Every rational being would, without a doubt, sneer at anyone who would rather not believe that he feels cold or warm until a piece of pure, substantial coldness or warmth could be placed in his hands to be taken apart. But anyone who demands a concept of God’s essence that is in the least conceived without relation to our moral nature and is independent of it in the smallest part has never known God and is estranged from the life that comes from Him. I will prove this last assertion further below, in what I hope will be a crystal-clear fashion.

⁶³ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 25–26 (GA I, 5, p. 352). Fichte slightly misquotes this passage and adds the phrase in parentheses.

Morality and religion are absolutely the same. Both are an apprehension of the supersensible, the first through action, the second through belief. If it has somewhere injured mankind to treat a distinction of viewpoint, which was made by philosophy, as a real difference in things, then it was here. Religion without morality is superstition, which deceives the unfortunate individual with a false hope and renders him incapable of any improvement. A putative morality without religion may well be an outwardly respectable way of life, since one <429> does what is right and avoids evil from fear of the consequences in the sensible world, but one never loves the good and performs it for its own sake. But as soon as one raises oneself to the willing of duty simply because it is duty, to a will that has no sensible incentives but rather only the supersensible aspect of thought, and simply does it not because of the object of the act but rather because of the supersensible aspect of our disposition, thus transplanting oneself by means of one's mode of thought into another world, the spirit and certainty of this other world immediately force themselves on us irresistibly. The liberation of the will, which we accomplish ourselves, becomes the means to and the security for the liberation of our entire being, which we cannot accomplish ourselves. Those who say: "duty must simply be done irrespective of any goal," do not express themselves precisely. Moreover, they will never be able to explain in their philosophies how a material content arises from the merely formal moral command, which, as a difficulty in the system, is only noticed by those with an intimate knowledge of philosophy; leaving this aside, they entirely misunderstand the mode of thought of a finite being. It is simply impossible for a human being to act without a goal in mind. By determining himself to act, there arises in him the concept of a future state of affairs that will result from his acting, and precisely this is the concept of a goal. "The goal to be reached by means of a dutiful disposition is simply not pleasure." This they wish to say, and they are right in doing so; it is the assertion of the dignity that is proper to reason. Those who say: "even if someone despaired of God and immortality, he would still have to do his duty," combine absolutely incompatible things. Only produce in yourself the dutiful disposition and you will know God, and while you still appear to the rest of us to be in the sensible world, for yourself, here below, you will already be in the eternal life. But once again they are right that the dutiful disposition is not grounded on belief in God and immortality, but rather that, on the contrary, belief in God and immortality is grounded on the dutiful disposition.

One can easily and clearly explain to anyone who is capable of true speculation and sustained attention that our experience as a whole is nothing but the product of our activity of representation. Consistent idealists have always assumed this, and up to this moment self-conscious skepticism that has been put into practice has been grounded on the very true assertion that nothing is binding for the free activity of representation. What is it, then, that, according to common sense, binds us nevertheless; that causes us <430> to regard our own products as things that are independent of us, to fear, admire, and desire our own creations, and to believe our fate dependent on an illusion that a single breath from a free being should destroy?

The supersensible, whose reflection in us is our sensible world—it is this that stops and forces us to attribute reality to its reflection as well. This is the true “in itself” that grounds all appearance, and our belief refers not to appearance but rather to its supersensible ground. My moral vocation, and whatever is connected with my consciousness of it, is the single immediate certainty that is given to me as I am given to myself, the only thing that gives me reality even for myself. Even if I were not distinctly conscious of that lofty vocation, and worked that much less to attain it, the demand to acknowledge it endures nonetheless; and it is this demand alone that gives me life and existence. The equally immediate pronouncement of my conscience—*what* my duty is—even if I do not heed it, determines my position in the order of other moral beings; and it is this position alone that transforms itself for my sensible eye, in accordance with laws that are to be demonstrated, into a material world. There is no certainty other than moral certainty, and all that is certain is so only to the extent that it indicates our moral condition. In my notorious essay I say the following about this (page 13): “The original limits of my being, as accords with their origin, are indeed incomprehensible; but what bothers you about this?—says practical philosophy; the *meaning* of those limits is the clearest, most certain that there is; they are your determinate place in the moral order of things. What you perceive as a consequence of them has reality, the only reality that concerns you and that there is for you. It is the continual interpretation of the command of duty, the living expression of *what* you should do simply because you should do it. Our world is the sensibly manifested material of our duty. This is what is actually real in things, the true ground of all appearance. The compulsion with which the belief in the reality of the world forces itself on us is a moral compulsion, the only compulsion that is possible for a free being. No one can give up his moral vocation to such an extent (apart from annihilation) that it does not, within these limits, at least preserve him for greater refinement in the future.”⁶⁴

Consequently, far from its being the case that the supersensible realm should be uncertain, it is the single certainty, and everything else is certain only on its account; far from its being the case that the <431> certainty of the supersensible realm should follow from the certainty of the sensible realm, the theoretical necessity of regarding the sensible realm as existing and the moral obligation of honoring the sensible realm as a means follow from the supersensible realm. The supersensible world is our birthplace and our only firm standpoint; the sensible world is only the reflection of the supersensible world. You do not believe in God because you believe in the world; on the contrary, you behold a world solely because you are determined to believe in God.

After all, according to my doctrine, the truly religious person is characterized only by a wish for the beatitude of all rational beings, a wish that stirs his breast

⁶⁴ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 25–26 (GA I, 5, p. 353). Fichte’s quotation differs slightly: he uses *Grund* [ground] instead of the original *Grundstoff* [basic element].

and inspires his life. “Thy kingdom come” is his prayer.⁶⁵ Nothing has the slightest attraction for him besides this one thing; he has gone numb to the possibility of desiring anything else. He knows only one means of promoting that goal, that of steadily following, without fear or quibbling, the voice of his conscience in all of his actions. This connects him once again with the world, not as an object of enjoyment, but rather with the sphere of his dutiful activity, a sphere that is assigned to him by his conscience. He does not love the world, but he honors it for the sake of conscience. It never becomes for him a *goal*. He never has something to aim at or to produce *in it*, but rather only *through it* in accordance with a connection that is incomprehensible to him and does not concern him. His purpose always concerns *the eternal*, which never appears, but which, in accordance with the infallible promise found in his inner nature, is certainly attained. Therefore, he is also completely indifferent to the results of his dutiful actions in the world of appearances. However they may seem, they are certainly good in themselves, for wherever duty is practiced, there is done the eternal will, and this is necessarily good. Not that my will but rather that His is done, not that my counsel but rather that His comes to pass, is the life’s wish of the truly religious person; and thus spreads unremitting joyfulness across his entire existence.

This character, which is to be attributed to every human being, can be developed, in accordance with my principles, only by at first guiding a person not to outward propriety but rather to inner righteousness. True faith is found with the latter, if only it is real, *inner* righteousness, and outward propriety occurs on its own. Without such righteousness, outward propriety is an inner perversity, and religion is a pernicious superstition leading mankind to complete ruin.

II.

<432> This doctrine, which is presented here in the context of this essay and is also contained in my other writings, e.g., in my doctrine of morals, is clearly and completely expressed in my notorious essay, indeed not in the same language that I use here but in a way that expresses the same content.⁶⁶ This and no other doctrine is the one that those people call atheism, the spreading of which they forbid with a prison sentence, on account of which they threaten me with dismissal and expulsion by means of imperial prosecution.

Before I go on, I ask every reader, I even ask my merciless persecutors, through an appeal to their conscience, whether they would seriously consider it dangerous for all people in the world to resemble the image of the religious person that I have just now drawn up, whether they seriously believe that they could restrain themselves from honoring a person with this character. I ask them, through an

⁶⁵ Matthew 6: 10.

⁶⁶ Fichte claims that “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance” expresses the same moral view as SE (GA, I, 5, pp. 19–317).

appeal to their conscience, whether they would not themselves like to be this person if they could become him through a sudden miracle. I ask everyone who has looked at the New Testament only a few times whether he has found nothing there about a complete rebirth as the exclusive condition of our salvation, nothing about the mortification of the flesh and becoming dead to the world, nothing about a life in heaven in spite of still living in this body.⁶⁷ I ask him, do these words have a meaning, and what may this meaning be?

Nevertheless, it is simply the case that they have decided that this doctrine is atheistic. They may have good reasons for this. I will see whether or not they do as I uncover these reasons.

Oh, I know the faction that could bring about such a ban and its mode of thought too well for it to be difficult for me to guess their reasons!

These reasons are contained in the presentation given just now. *According to me*, the relation of divinity to us, as moral beings, is the immediately given one. A separate existence for this divinity is contemplated solely on account of our finite capacity for representation; and this existence contains absolutely nothing but those immediately given relations, except that they are combined into a unified concept. *According to my opponents*, those relations of divinity to us should first be deduced and derived from a cognition of God's essence in and for itself independent of these relations; <433> and in this cognition, moreover, there is supposed to be something else (according to some, more; according to others, less) that has no relation to us at all. As regards warmth or coldness, I admit to knowing only that I am really warm or cold. *They* know, without ever in their life having had a sensation of this kind, warmth and coldness as things in themselves; and only then, on the basis of this cognition, do they generate frost in itself and heat in itself through the power of their syllogisms. My inability to fashion such syllogisms is what they call my atheism.

In order to arrive at this cognition of the divine essence (which even they do not pass off as an immediate cognition) independently of the relations of divinity to us (which they want to derive from that cognition in the first place), they must necessarily have sources of cognition that are denied to me. So it is. They infer the existence and attributes of God from the existence and constitution of a sensible

⁶⁷ Fichte is alluding to the following passages: "Jesus answered and said unto him, verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, how can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God" (John 3: 3–5); "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die, but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Romans 8: 13); "Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world ..." (Colossians 2: 20); "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself" (Philippians 3: 20–21).

world. They make this inference precisely because both the existence of the sensible world as independent of our activity of representation and this activity of representation as independent of our moral vocation are flatly denied to them. They deduce *from* this existence instead of—as would be necessary—deducing *this existence itself* in the first place; and as a well-deserved punishment for their circular proofs, in this case they produce doctrines that are very unintelligible.⁶⁸ Either they permit not only quite a lot but everything to originate from nothing; or they permit matter in itself, existing independently of a pure intelligence, to be formed by means of the mere concepts of that very intelligence. They grasp infinitude in a finite concept, and they marvel at God's wisdom for having arranged everything precisely as they themselves would also have made it. Since here I do not descend into the depths of speculation, but rather must rely solely on the ineradicable moral sense found in the breast of every human being, I will not waste one more word in this essay on such a method of proof. I would merely like to express the following wish to my opponents! One would think that it would have occurred to them to produce on this occasion a single *intelligible* word (as was requested from me) about what "God created the world" may actually mean, and about *how* one has to think such a creation (but only insofar as the topic is the real *world* of the sensible world and not the moral order of purely mental intellects). It may still occur to them. They might offer prizes for this single intelligible word, two or even ten prizes! But as long as they do not produce a single word, I have the right to think that one must lose one's common sense in order to <434> believe in God as they do, and that my atheism solely consists of the fact that I would rather retain mine.⁶⁹

Nonetheless, this matter may be however it will be, and either my opponents or I may be correct about it, but they are certainly incorrect for having caused the ban on my writings. If it is the overarching goal of religion to cultivate the purely religious character that we have described above, then everything that has no influence on this education is to be regarded with indifference. But how one answers the exclusively philosophical question regarding the originating ground of this belief within the human mind certainly has no influence on it. Common sense

⁶⁸ Fichte is saying that his opponents attempt to infer their relation to the divine from some concept of the divine essence (God in and for himself), which, in turn, they attempt to infer from the existence and nature of the sensible world; but since they could only be aware of the sensible world by virtue of an intellectual intuition of their own thinking activity, which they, in turn, could only have in conjunction with an intellectual intuition of their moral vocation (or their relation to divinity), their proof is circular: It infers our relation to the divine from our moral vocation (or our relation to the divine). Moreover, since they attempt to infer the existence of the intelligible (God) from the sensible (the world) as cause from effect—and the sensible world is precisely the mediate contingency that must be inferred from the immediate necessity of the intelligible world—they produce an unintelligible—and similarly circular—cosmology as well.

⁶⁹ The phrase *seinen gesunden Verstand* is here translated as "one's common sense."

is left with the fact and leaves the explaining to the philosopher.⁷⁰ Whether or not one's concept includes characteristics of God of which it is explicitly admitted that they have no relation to our moral vocation certainly has no influence on this fact.

Consequently, my opponents have not at all caused the ban on my writings as guardians of the people's religion and as religious individuals themselves, but rather they have caused it as philosophers, as my philosophical opposition. Let them think over whether it arouses a favorable preconception of the goodness of their cause and of their courage that they prefer a ban to a refutation.

Thus stands the matter, if only they grant to me that the moral conviction of a divine world-order, which I have set forth, is possible and sufficient for the cultivation of a genuinely religious disposition. If they do not grant this to me, if instead they maintain that their proffered route to conviction is not only possible but also the only possible one, and that I have simultaneously deprived them of divinity itself as well as their untenable proof, then, of course, the matter between us is different. Then in fact I deny their God; then for them I really am an admitted atheist. I know the system of my opponents from its very foundation. I know it better than many of them know it themselves and know only too well that the latter is our situation; and this compels me to dwell a little while longer on them.

I say (page 18 of that essay) that the concept of God as a separate *substance* is an impossible and contradictory concept.⁷¹ (Substance, of course, necessarily means a being sensibly existing in space and time, <435> for reasons that I can exempt myself from citing here. It is enough for my current purpose that I explain my use of philosophical language.) I say that the proof of God's existence from the existence of a sensible world is impossible and contradictory. I deny, therefore, *a substantial God who is to be derived from the sensible world*. Because I deny this, to them I become an atheist altogether, despite everything else that I affirm about a supersensible God and the moral ground of belief. What I affirm is therefore nothing to them, absolutely nothing. For them there is nothing at all but the substantial and the sensible; consequently, for them there is only a God who is substantial and derivable from the sensible world. First of all, why is there nothing else for them? And why, then, is the supersensible nothing to them? Why is it not at all extant for them, not even as regards its possibility? I can say this to them. The sphere of our cognition is determined by our heart; only by means of our striving do we embrace whatever will exist for us. They remain with their understanding in the realm of sensible being, because their heart is satisfied by this being. They know nothing that lies beyond this being, because nothing drives them beyond it. They are eudaemonists in their moral doctrine; consequently, in speculation they must

⁷⁰ The phrase *der gemeine Verstand* is here translated as "common sense."

⁷¹ "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," pp. 27–28 (GA, I, 5, p. 356).

become dogmatists. Eudaemonism and dogmatism, if one is simply consistent, are necessarily found together, just as are moralism and idealism.⁷²

This substantial God of theirs, who is assumed to exist on account of the sensible world, what sort of being, then, is He? That pious simplicity pictures God as an enormous extension throughout infinite space, or that even greater simplicity pictures Him as He is portrayed in the old Dresden hymn book, as an old man, a young man, and a dove—if only this God is in other respects a moral being and believed in with a pure heart, the wise person can good-naturedly smile at this. But that one calls the person who will not imagine divinity in this form an atheist, bans his writings, and decries him before the nation's ears, is to be taken much more seriously. And this is without a doubt the case here. The chief reason for this accusation, without a doubt, is that I deny God as a separate substance. A substantial God, however, is necessarily a body extended in space (on account of which one also assigns to Him a shape).

I go to the second part of their reprimand. By doing so I can make myself even more intelligible. How, then, does a God assumed to exist <436> on account of the sensible world, and by a heart that is not able to raise itself above this very world, necessarily turn out?

Their final goal is always pleasure, whether or not they desire it in a coarse fashion or have purified it ever so subtly: pleasure in this life and, if they imagine a continued existence beyond earthly death, pleasure there as well. They know nothing but pleasure. That the result of their struggling for this pleasure depends on something unknown, which they call fate, they cannot conceal from themselves. They personify this fate, *and this is their God*. Their God is the provider of all pleasure, the distributor of all good and bad fortune to finite beings. This is His fundamental character.

They have come to this God along the indicated path of an insatiable yearning for pleasure; and, consequently, they are in error and do their own belief an injustice when they treat it as indirect, as a consequence of other cognitions. It is just as immediate as that belief of ours; it comes from the heart, as does ours, and not from the understanding. That they regard the sensible world, which also contains the ultimate goal of their existence, as existing for itself, as something real, and that they ascribe absolute dominance over that very world to their God, who is said to distribute the good and bad fortune in it (so that He must also be its creator, for otherwise they would not depend on Him entirely), is completely consistent and necessary in their system. Only they are in error about the manner in which they come to this assumption. In fact, they know it immediately and do

⁷² This allusion is particularly directed toward the journal *Eudämonia* wherein Fichte had been accused of attempting to replace the official “church of Christ” with the “church of reason.”

not have it by means of inferences. What they offer as demonstrations are mere repetitions of what their hearts believe independently of all demonstrations.⁷³

That their God really has the fundamental character mentioned above; that He is the master of fate and the dispenser of all happiness; that it was His plan at the creation of the world to produce the greatest possible sum-total of pleasure—of this they make no secret at all. It pervades their entire system. They exhaust their eloquence in order to enjoin it as something quite sublime. They are so unabashed about it that I can imagine the approval with which most of those partaking of this mode of thought read the description of their God that I have just now given, rejoicing that I present the matter so well and do justice to them; and I can imagine how remotely it occurs to them that one can have anything against it.

And they thereby completely bring to light their radical blindness regarding spiritual things, their complete estrangement from the life that is lived in God. He who <437> wishes for pleasure is a sensuous, carnal person who has no religion and is incapable of any religion. The first truly religious sentiment mortifies desire in us forever. Whoever expects happiness is a fool unfamiliar with himself and his entire predisposition. There is no happiness. Happiness is not possible. The expectation of happiness, and a God whom one assumes on account of it, are phantasms. A God who is said to serve appetite is a contemptible being. He performs a service that even a mediocre human being finds disgusting. Such a God is an evil being, for He supports and perpetuates human depravity and the degradation of reason. Such a God is quite rightly “the prince of the world” to whom they perversely apply the words, and who has long been condemned and sentenced by the voice of truth.⁷⁴ Their worship is the worship of this prince. *They* are the true atheists. They are completely godless and have created for themselves a terrible idol. That I am not willing to acknowledge this idol of theirs in place of the true God, this is what they call atheism. This is what they have sworn to persecute.

The system in which happiness is expected from a superior being is the system of idolatry and false worship, which is as old as human depravity and which has merely changed its outward form with the passage of time. Be this superior being a bone, a bird feather, or be it an almighty, omnipresent, omniscient creator of heaven

⁷³ A similar account of the extra-philosophical commitments that ground the dispute between dogmatism and idealism (and hence of Eudaemonism and moralism) can be found in *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre*: “First Introduction,” IWL, pp. 15–20 (GA, I, 4, pp. 192–196).

⁷⁴ Fichte is alluding to the following biblical passages: “Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the prince of this world be cast out” (John 12: 31); and “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you, but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father and you see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged” (John 16: 7–11).

and earth, if happiness is expected of it, then it is an idol. The difference between the two systems lies merely in the better choice of expressions. The essence of the error is the same in both, and the heart remains equally perverted in both.

Here, therefore, is the true source of my dispute with them. What *they* call God is an idol *to me*. To me, God is a being completely liberated from all sensibility and every sensible addendum, a being to whom, therefore, I cannot even attribute the *sensible* concept of existence that is possible for me alone. To me, God is merely and solely the regent of the supersensible world. I deny their God and give warning against him for being the offspring of human depravity; and for this reason I do not at all become an atheist but rather a defender of religion. They are not acquainted with my God and are not able to raise themselves to the concept of Him. He does not exist for them at all; consequently, they cannot even deny Him and in this respect are not atheists. But they exist *without God*, and in this respect they are atheists. But it is far from my heart to label them in a spiteful fashion with this term. On the contrary, my religion teaches me <438> to pity them for relinquishing what is highest and noblest for what is most insignificant. This religion teaches me to hope that they will sooner or later discover their lamentable condition, and that they will regard as lost all the days of their lives in comparison to the entirely new and wonderful existence that will then open up to them.⁷⁵

Now, in order to make them even more intimately acquainted with themselves, we shall examine their idol even further. It is not rightly entitled to the holy name of God. Willful, as they themselves are, He is formed in their image; He connects the happiness expected from Him with the fulfillment of certain conditions, simply because He wills these conditions. The more incomprehensible this will, the more believable it is that it is His will, for He thereby becomes all the more an unfathomable, that is, a capricious, God who is known for His superior strength instead of His universal justice. The fulfillment of certain ceremonies, the recitation of certain formulas, and the belief in unintelligible propositions become the means to ingratiate oneself with Him and to partake of His blessings. If the matter proceeds in the most tolerable fashion, virtue becomes this means. Obviously, it is mere outward propriety, for true morality consists in practicing duty simply for its own sake; and wherever pleasure is intended as a reward, morality has already been abandoned and irretrievably destroyed. In this capacity, this God has at least the merit of assisting in inadequate policing arrangements.

In this system, God is unceasingly lauded and praised as no righteous human being would allow himself to be praised. Here there is always only talk of His goodness, and again of His goodness, and they can never become tired of thinking

⁷⁵ Fichte is alluding to the following biblical passages: “But what things were gain for me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” (Philippians 3: 7–8); and “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians, 5: 17).

of this goodness, without even once mentioning His justice. Here everything is the same to Him. He puts up with everything and must put up with everything; and whatever human beings may do, He always comes afterwards with His blessing. And, what is most dreadful herein, they believe, not that they say it but only think it, that their God gladly listens to this, and that they say what He wants to hear.

Here one listens to such edifying thoughts as the following: "How good is God. He has not only given us nourishment to keep us alive but has also imparted to it a particular pleasant flavor. Now, devout soul, really relish how sweet this grape is, how tangy this apple is, so that you learn to appreciate God's goodness properly." The poor, perhaps well-meaning but blind, prattler: none of the pleasantries strewn throughout your sensible existence <439> exists so that you may devoutly ponder them, but rather so that your power of joyfully doing the work of the Lord on this earth may be strengthened, enlivened, and heightened. Let them teach the subject to be regarded *in this fashion*, and then they will praise God for those things for which He will be praised.

In the mouth of this system, the most sublime and holiest doctrine that ever came among men, that of Christianity, has lost all its spirit and power and has been transformed into an enervating doctrine of happiness. I do not wish to accuse them of willfully distorting this doctrine, but just as soon as it comes into their sphere, it loses its sublime meaning. They see absolutely nothing in it; they point at and twiddle with it until some meaning comes out that they can grasp. The one who endured suffering, when He could have had joy, speaks through them as a fine Epicurean. "Crucify your flesh, along with its lusts and desires."⁷⁶ To them, these are oriental images and figures of speech, which, in accordance with our mode of thought, mean roughly the following: save and wisely dole out your pleasures so that you can enjoy them all the more; don't eat too much so that you don't get a stomachache, don't drink so that you don't one day get a headache. "Become reborn, become born of the spirit, become a new creation."⁷⁷ According to them, this means something like the following in our language: day by day become cleverer and wiser about your true interests. "Our life is in heaven; I live, not I, but a new man lives in me."⁷⁸ According to them, this is a mere image that means nothing at all in our language.

⁷⁶ Fichte is alluding to the biblical passage: "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Galatians 5: 24).

⁷⁷ Fichte is paraphrasing 2 Corinthians 5: 17; and is alluding to the following biblical passages: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee: Ye must be born again" (John 3: 6-8); and "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature" (Galatians 6: 15).

⁷⁸ "Our life," or "*Unser Wandel*," is more literally, "our transformation." Fichte is alluding to the biblical passage: "Behold I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed" (1 Corinthians 15: 51). See also Philippians 3: 20-21. Fichte is alluding to the biblical passage: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I,

Who knows all of this better, who could know it better, than the various venerable members of the high government institutions in the Electorate of Saxony? Those who in a certain community, whose language I would admittedly not use, but which indeed has the great merit of not misunderstanding the supersensible and the eternal, those who in this community, or perhaps on other paths, protected from that enervating doctrine, have heard the extolling of the religion of Jesus as a doctrine of happiness, certainly often from the pulpits in the Electorate of Saxony and in catechism, and certainly not without intense aversion.⁷⁹ Who could know it better than they? I know that individuals among them realize quite well the true source of this evil—the eudaemonistic, superficial, affected, sweet-talking philosophy that has found so much approval with their students—and have wished to drive out this shallow philosophy through the study <440> of a genuinely more thorough and more powerful one, that of *Crusius*.⁸⁰ But they should become acquainted with the modern philosophy. Not satisfied with one-sided reports from other people, they should read it with their own eyes! To be sure, at that time—when in its main sources it was still extremely unintelligible and gained interpreters who themselves understood nothing of it—the study of the modern philosophy did not seem suitable for men who were preoccupied elsewhere. That time is over. This philosophy can now be imparted to thoughtful and unprejudiced men in the easiest manner. These men might at least consider honoring the present essay with an attentive reading, and they would be able to gather from it the actual intention of this system. I will state it in a few words: with respect to the doctrine of religion, its overarching goal is to snatch away from mankind all the props supporting its laziness and all the reasons for glossing over its depravity, to stop up all the sources of its false consolation, and to leave neither its understanding nor its heart any standpoint other than that of pure duty and belief in the supersensible world. Hence, even in its theoretical part, the assertion of the absolute ideality of all sensible being, contrary to the dogmatist, whose mind attributes self-subsisting reality to the latter because his heart is contented with that very thing. Our philosophy does not deny all reality; it denies only the reality of the temporal and the transitory in order to

but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2: 20). See also Galatians 4: 22–24 and Colossians 3: 4–10.

⁷⁹ Fichte means the religious community of *Herrnhuter Brüdergemeinde* or the Moravian Brotherhood, originally founded by Jan Hus (1372–1415) and later influenced by the pietistic Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700–1760). The Moravian Brothers accepted the Augsburg Confession of 1530 and placed particular emphasis on experiencing the Holy Spirit and living in imitation of Christ.

⁸⁰ Christian August Crusius (1715–75) was a philosophy and theology professor at the University of Leipzig. He believed determinism had a morally deleterious influence on religion. Crusius had some influence on both Kant’s and Fichte’s philosophies of religion. See, for example, *Einige Aphorismen über Religion und Deismus* [Some Aphorisms on Religion and Deism] (1790) (GA, I, 1, p. 289).

establish that of the eternal and the everlasting in its full dignity. It is strange to accuse this philosophy of denying divinity, since it instead denies the existence of the world in the sense in which it is asserted by dogmatism. What sort of God would it be who disappeared along with the world? Our philosophy denies the existence of a sensible god and servant of desire, but the supersensible God is its all-in-all. To our philosophy, it is that which alone exists, and we remaining rational spirits all live and move only in Him.⁸¹ Christianity is not a philosophical system. It does not address itself to speculation but rather to the moral sense of mankind; therefore, it cannot speak or be articulated as a systematic philosophical doctrine. But if nine-tenths of it should be given up as absolutely meaningless, and if in the explication of the remaining tenth the interpretations offered above should be the only correct ones, then it has the same goal as our philosophy. Now those worthy men know this goal of Christianity quite well. <441> If only they might desire to become acquainted with that of the modern philosophy as well! They would then no longer allow themselves to be induced by others, who know neither Christianity nor philosophy, to ban as atheistic essays embodying the spirit of this philosophy; and the name of an admirable prince, who must be truly religious since he is so good and just, would not stand at the top of rescripts in which defenses of true religion are labeled attacks on it.⁸²

I can even bring my case, to the greatest advantage, before those officials who do not concern themselves with religion, but who take to heart the interests of careful study and scientific progress. Man's every power is acquired through struggling with himself and overcoming himself; and mental ability in particular is acquired through struggling with the preconceptions that are innate to us and grounded in our sensible nature and through overcoming the blind propensity towards the association of ideas. He who does only what he desires to do, who never produces with real self-activity, i.e., contrary to some propensity, but only lets himself be driven forward by the current of his impressions, he is, and remains—however fortunate these impressions may be now and then, however fluid their current may be—a shallow mind, unworthy of being called a scholar. Only that person who freely and resolutely takes up his task, of whatever kind it may be; only that person who follows his path systematically while warding off all foreign thoughts; only that person who does not rest until he has found the foundation, or at least knows how far the foundation extends and where nothing more is to be sought; only he who does not believe that he has done something as long as there is still more to do—only that person is a thorough scholar. One obtains this capacity only by learning, with difficulty and effort, to understand and regard as true principles that do not present themselves to us on their own but rather are contrary to people's usual first opinion. Nothing is opposed to this, the only possible, method of

⁸¹ Fichte is alluding to the biblical passage: "For in Him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of our poets have said, for we are also his offspring" (Acts 17: 28).

⁸² This "admirable prince" is Friedrich August III, Elector of Saxony.

cultivating the mind. There is nothing that makes a youth so completely superficial and deprives him of any spirit than the eudaemonistic system. Here mankind is still thoroughly stuck in the rut in which nature placed it, and has a hard time taking a new path; for that system is innate in us, and no effort is required to place the goal of our existence in pleasure. The youth who studies only for the sake of enjoyment reluctantly clutches at the surface of his memory, which he requires simply to get through—alas! <442>—the prescribed exams, and along the way hunts for empty aesthetic phrases in spiritless poems and novels, so that he can some day urge their lasciviousness on people in an appropriately moving fashion. Thinking for himself, ordering his thoughts, giving an account of their order, is to him a hard, outrageous, unjust demand. I ask everyone who is acquainted with the ways of the world and has the opportunity to observe his surroundings to tell me whether he has not found these eudaemonistic-minded people everywhere (and in all the disciplines into which they have fallen) to be loudmouths and shallow imitators. I do not presume to decide but rather leave it to the guardians of science in this state, from whose borders the modern philosophy is so carefully barred, to investigate for themselves the extent to which this account harmonizes with the scientific situation of this state.⁸³

I can even bring my case, to the greatest advantage, before those officials who concern themselves neither with religion nor with philosophy but rather intend only the preservation of civic peace and order. If it is true, which I wish neither to assert nor to deny here, if it is true that in our age a more unrestrained lasciviousness, caprice, and antipathy to the law; if a more presumptuous quibbling about things that one can only judge from a higher standpoint; if a livelier insistence in many people to abandon their assigned place in the order of things and to enter into a higher one; if a more unbridled striving to disclose for themselves new sources of gratification—once the old ones are exhausted—raises its head more frequently and less secretively than in past ages, then people can stop blaming the modern philosophy for it. A pernicious philosophy does not interfere with the mode of thought of the great mass of people until it exclusively controls the schools for a long time; until it has been popularized in peace by practitioners who have not had to fight any external wars; until it has settled into the overarching philosophy of the people, into their religion, and among their own teachers, the clergymen; until it has overcome the resistance of the common sense of the age, before which it was initially brought, and has educated their entire generation from catechism onward. You yourselves know only too well that the modern philosophy, its inner nature entirely set aside now, does not yet find itself in such a situation and is still far from entering into it. At most you yourselves, the guardians of nations, know that such a thing is wandering about but not <443> what it actually is. What your preachers have said here and there about this philosophy consists of formulas that are unintelligible to them, as they are to everyone else, and that can neither hurt nor help. If the mischief attributed to a philosophical system is to be explained,

⁸³ This “state” is Electoral Saxony.

then you must go back further, to the system that was the dominant one prior to the new one; and there you once again find eudaemonism. That the religion of Jesus is transformed when it is made to conform to eudaemonism, that eudaemonism can be drawn from the very souls of the immature, and that eudaemonism is being preached from the pulpit to those who are of age, I already mentioned this to you above. And you can still ask whence arises the depravity of our time! If you only preach to a human being, and preach to him again and again, that the overarching goal of his existence, that the goal of creation in its entirety, that the true will of God is his happiness (to which he is already inclined on his own), then without a doubt he will believe you. He will strive to promote his good fortune in every way, since he himself is indisputably the best judge of what makes for his own happiness. He will not let himself be diverted by any subordinate goal while pursuing the highest goal of his existence; and he will believe it to be nothing but the will of God, in accordance with the doctrine that you have inculcated in him. Once you have unfettered him, by means of that formula, from the true bond that should hold him, i.e., morality, you will try in vain to use another one—"but this is not your *true* happiness"—to bind him again. He will laugh at you, for he thinks that he must know better than you what his good fortune requires, and he is right in thinking this. You may well be saying this, he thinks, because you too strive to promote your good fortune and presently he begins to obstruct it. You will never persuade him that it is his good fortune to wear himself out so that, as it seems to him, and perhaps is in fact, you can be idle; that he do without what is most necessary so that, as it seems to him and perhaps is in fact, you can indulge yourself; that he obey so that you can command. Had you, on the contrary, inculcated in him, impressed on him from youth onward, made this sublime thought a part of his being—"the world is not my home, and nothing that it can offer can satisfy me; my true being does not depend on the role that I play among appearances but rather on *how* I play with them; since I occupy this post, it is the will of God that I occupy it and joyfully and bravely accomplish whatever belongs to this post; however insignificant my occupation may be, it is done for God's sake and for duty's sake, and thereby receives its dignity; I have plenty to do on my own; it is not my business to look into whether or not others in their posts also do what belongs to them; <444> if they do not do it, they sin at their own risk; without a doubt, however, God will resolve in good time all the disorder that arises from their sinning into the most beautiful harmony"—had you inculcated this thought in him (the fundamental thought of Christianity, I believe, and of my philosophy), the heroic spirit, and the inexpressible peace that it must have spread over his life, would without any doubt have made him into a useful and quiet citizen.⁸⁴

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⁸⁴ Fichte is alluding to the biblical passage: "Jesus answered, my kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews, but now is my kingdom not from hence" (John 18: 36).

I will summarize everything.

The heart of the dispute between my opponents and me is that we are situated in two different worlds and speak of two different worlds—they, the sensible world; I, the supersensible world—and that they relate everything to pleasure, whatever form this pleasure may have, whereas I relate everything to pure duty.

Because of this absolute opposition of principles, our entire systems of thought, our philosophies, and our religions necessarily oppose one another, to the extent that we are consistent. What is solely the true and absolute *for me* does not exist at all *for them* and is a chimera and phantasm for them. What they take to be the true and absolute is *to me* a mere illusion without any true reality.

We have both arrived at these principles of our thinking in its entirety not by means of thinking itself but rather by means of something that is higher than all thinking; and here I can justifiably call this the *heart*. But whatever we ourselves have not obtained through a process of reasoning, we cannot communicate to anyone else by means of this process; therefore, we cannot reciprocally prove our principles to each other.⁸⁵ Whatever we can demonstrate to each other, we always demonstrate on the basis of premises, and our consequences hold reciprocally for each other only if we grant those premises to each other; the premises, however, we decisively deny on both sides. It is therefore absolutely impossible for us to refute, convince, or instruct each other. I would have to adopt their way of thinking in order to acknowledge their truth, and this is impossible once I am where I am now. Or they would have to adopt my way of thinking in order to acknowledge my truth, and from my side I certainly take this to be possible. Indeed, I am bound by conscience to believe that one day they will adopt the very same way of thinking, but I cannot in any way force them to do so.

<445> I have occasionally boasted of yet another advantage over them, but it disappears almost into nothing if the matter is looked at closely. I have occasionally claimed that they cannot explain what they undertake to explain and, instead of the desired explanations, produce empty and unintelligible words; and one should be able to prove at least this much to them.⁸⁶ But even this can be proved to them only with much difficulty, because they themselves, by being at the summit of speculation in which the unintelligibility of their assertions is evident, for the most part no longer understand anything.

Now what is to be done, considering that this is the state of things?

To begin with, what might my opponents first think of doing?

If excited, hostile minds—alas, the noble struggle for truth can degenerate into personal malice!—if they intend to attack *this* work, as they have done before with so many of my writings, by tearing passages out of context or actually misrepresenting them in order to attribute to the author a meaning that his heart

⁸⁵ See *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre*: “First Introduction,” IWL, pp. 18–25 (GA, I, 4, pp. 194–99).

⁸⁶ See *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre*: “First Introduction,” IWL, pp. 20–5 (GA, I, 4, pp. 196–199).

abhors, in order to abuse and defame him passionately, then let them do so! I had hoped that the good spirits and cheerful mood in my previous responses to such treatment would not be misjudged or taken to be passionate hostility. People have misjudged them and become angry over them, and so I take this opportunity to give the public my pledge never to take any further notice of any passionate pronouncement made against me.

If others intend even now, completely dispassionately, to tell me once more what we have already heard so often, that it is not in human beings to renounce all pleasure, then I merely remind these people that therein lies precisely the source of our dispute: that in order to refute my essay they are quoting to me the very principle that I have denied throughout the entire essay, and that they will know full well what this mistake regarding proof is called in logic.⁸⁷ This they can urge against other people who believe it, only not against me.

If a third faction (and I fear that it will be very numerous) intends to say: “The mistake lies in wanting to tear away these supports too suddenly; one should go slowly and first bring human beings to legality by means of the enticements and frightening devices of superstition in order to raise them from that level to morality,” then I remind these people that here they are only offering the usual <446> excuse of weakness and imperfection, which sees the truth without having the courage to acknowledge and follow it, and that they find themselves in a very dangerous error. There is no steady transition from sensibility to morality that passes through outward propriety. The transformation—and not a mere restoration but rather a complete regeneration—must take place by means of a leap. It must be a rebirth.

Consequently, since we can neither come together nor come apart, given how the matter currently stands, they will allow me to make a conciliatory proposal.

That in their opinion I am mistaken goes without saying, and for the present I intend to argue about it with them no further. But it will probably make a difference to them, as regards my guilt, whether my assertions have been tossed out impudently and rashly and, as it were, in order to defy them, or whether grounds can be offered for them and something plausible can be adduced in their favor. Once they have finished reading this essay, then, I hope, they will not wish to deny the latter. Furthermore, they will have to admit to me that this doctrine is not dangerous in its consequences. If they are correct, and if I am incorrect, then the worst consequence is that the adherents and practitioners of this doctrine become good-natured fanatics who deprive themselves of life’s pleasures. But how does this injure *them*? On the contrary, if they are consistent in their mode of thought, then they must enjoy themselves and from their side must attempt to contribute everything possible to ridding themselves in this way of many contenders and competitors for their happiness. This very inconsistency of theirs, this very desire of theirs to make others just as smart and just as happy as they themselves are without the least advantage to them arising out of it, could make them doubtful as

⁸⁷ It is called in logic *petitio principii* [begging the question].

to whether their own conduct is not in fact grounded on a more exalted principle than they are willing to grant. Finally, however, doubt is secretly stirred inside of them—I am sure of this and can know it—as to whether or not I might be right. And they may not want—I am sure of this—to risk their entire happiness, temporal and eternal, on being certain that I am wrong. Actually, if they scrutinize themselves properly, they will find that they have only been waiting for the proper time to consider the matter. Thus they are now awaiting such an opportunity. If I asserted all by myself what I am asserting, then earlier they could have at most believed that I am a fanatic and that I am not in command of my reason. But do I stand so entirely alone? Which theologian, entirely free of any suspicion of partisanship, <447> do I name as my authority? Would that you, venerable Father *Spalding*—whose *The Vocation of Man* sowed the first seed of higher speculation in my young soul, and all of whose writings, just like the one mentioned, so exquisitely characterize the striving for the supersensible and the everlasting—would that you could, and would wish to, speak up on my behalf!⁸⁸ And the senior chaplain *Reinhard*, who must have sat among the judges of my atheism and my attacks on religion in the ecclesiastical court of the Electorate of Saxony—I have none of his latest writings to hand, but in a learned newspaper I find an advertisement for his latest collection of sermons.⁸⁹ What can he be saying in these sermons: “On the joyful philanthropic faith that everything must get better and better in this world,” “That one cannot be a true Christian without a certain degree of noble inspiration,” “Of the feeling of imperishability with which Christians are supposed to regard the decrepitude of everything worldly”—what can the clever and thorough man be saying in such sermons other than what I have said in that banned essay and in this one, and what everyone must say who takes the true, inner religion to heart?⁹⁰ And,

⁸⁸ Spalding’s *Betrachtung über die Bestimmung des Menschen*, 1748 [*Reflection on the Vocation of Man* (1748)] (Vienna, 1769), a description of individual moral-religious development that sparked a debate between Thomas Abbt (1738–66) and Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86) in 1764, influenced Fichte and many of the young moralists of his day. For an account of Spalding’s influence as a provincial pastor suddenly elevated to a counselor of the High Consistory in Berlin, see Anthony La Vopa’s *Grace, Talent, and Merit: Poor Students, Clerical Careers, and Professional Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 232–43.

⁸⁹ Although Reinhard had once expressed regard for Fichte’s *Critique of All Revelation*, he was one of the members of the High Consistory who first brought a declaration about Forberg’s essay to Friedrich August’s attention on 29 October 1798. The “learned newspaper” to which Fichte refers is *Predigten im Jahre 1797* [*Sermons in the Year 1797*] (Sulzbach, 1798).

⁹⁰ “Von dem frohen menschenfreundlichen Glauben, daß es immer besser auf Erden werden müsse, am Tage der Reinigung Maria, über Luc. II. v. 21–32” [“Of the Happy Humanitarian Belief that Things on Earth must become ever Better, on the Day of the Purification of Mary, from Lk 2: 21–32”] p. 42; “Daß man ohne einem gewissen Grad von edler Begeisterung kein wahrer Christ seyn kann, am ersten Pfingsttage, über Joh. XIV. v. 23–31” [“That One cannot know the True Christ without a certain Degree of lofty

among philosophers, you, noble *Jacobi*, whose hand I grasp more confidently, however differently we may think about mere theory, what matters here you said long ago—exactly as I think it—and with a vigor and warmth with which I can never say it.* You have made it <448> the soul of your philosophizing: “One becomes aware of God by means of a godly life.”⁹¹

Therefore, since all of this is the case, here is my conciliatory proposal! Immediately and henceforth, it is preferable that we have nothing more to do with each other. Better that they apply themselves to those in whom they can still hope to find an opening for their doctrine, and I will do the same on my side. Let each party do whatever it pleases in order to bring others into agreement with itself. Only do no harm to anyone in the other party; only let our competition be honest, and let no one make use of forbidden weapons. Just as I would certainly not ban and confiscate their writings, certainly not prohibit and decry either attendance at the universities in which they have their seat or their lectures (even if I were capable of doing so), let them not do so on their side as well. Let them wait for time to judge between the two of us. I only ask for a short period of time. If after a decade the greater number of good heads and hearts are not on my side, if many of those who now inveigh against me are not then entirely of my opinion and the others are not at least more moderate, then I will not say another word. They may then proceed against me as much as they can.

I do not include the ecclesiastical court of the Electorate of Saxony (or whichever institution it was that issued the confiscation order and raised the accusation of atheism) among my opponents, not because we stand in an unequal relationship to each other, but rather because we have no relationship to each other at all.⁹² Men of affairs have neither the time nor the expertise to investigate such things. In these matters they must depend on the reports of scholars. But will these men of affairs also examine *my* report and take it to heart? Will they understand what it means to proclaim publicly, to the ears of the German nation, that a man who is regarded as an atheist and an enemy of all religion is a man who—for now I intend, as the most extreme case, to ascribe to them the mode of thought of my opponents and

Inspiration, on the First Whitsunday, from Jn 14: 23–31”], p. 222; “Von dem Gefühle der Unvergänglichkeit, mit welchem Christen die Hinfälligkeit alles Irdischen betrachten sollen, am zehnten Sonntage nach Trinitatis, über Luc. XIX. v. 41–48,” [“Of the Feeling of Immortality according to which Christians should consider the Futility of all Earthly Things, on Tithing Sunday after Trinity, from Lk 19: 41–48”], p. 255 in *Predigten im Jahre 1797* (Sulzbach, 1798).

⁹¹ “Try to grow in a virtue perfectly, that is to exercise it purely and incessantly. Either you desist in the attempt or you’ll become aware of God in yourself, just as you are aware of yourself” (*Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn*, MPW, p. 243).

⁹² The “ecclesiastical court of the Electorate of Saxony,” or “Chursächsischen Kirchenrath,” was the protestant privy council, or ecclesiastical consistory, that advised the Catholic Elector Friedrich August III concerning matters pertaining to the Lutheran and Evangelical Christian churches.

to assume that they must grant me nothing more than this—is a man who is quite possibly correct, and that his essay is a defense of religion rather than an attack on it? Will they have the courage to confess, which is the very least compensation that they owe to my defamed good name, for which they are very much to blame, and to my threatened sphere of influence, for which they are very much to blame; will they have the resulting courage <449> to offer this compensation? Let all this be left up to them alone. All this can be left up to them all the more once my interest is no longer involved in this matter at all but rather only theirs—if they have such an interest. Their accusation became important to me only on account of its effect on the German public. I have now brought the matter directly before this public, and a large majority, I hope, will now decide *in my favor*, or, not as I hope but rather know for certain, will decide *in my favor* after the passing of several years. At present it can only be disadvantageous to them, because they ought to say (not that I expect it): “Ah, who can do us any harm, our position is much too lofty, what do we care about it?” I say, it can only be disadvantageous to them to have pronounced that harsh accusation and not to have retracted it; as it also can only just bring them honor, trust in their judgments, and influence on letters as a whole in the German fatherland if they candidly declare: “We are infallible when it comes to civil legislation and judicial verdicts and demand unconditional submission in these matters, but in our judgments regarding literary affairs we can be mistaken, for we are human beings; here we have made a mistake, and we freely and publicly retract our error.” I credit them with this magnanimity, and experience will teach whether or not I have credited them with too much of it.

By means of this essay I give them the opportunity to do this in a suitable way. In addition to the first issue that was confiscated because of the electoral rescript, the Leipzig book commission has also confiscated the second issue on its own authority.** I hereby publicly accuse them of this. Let <450> the ecclesiastical court of the Electorate of Saxony order that this second issue be returned. Let it on this occasion also permit the sale of the first issue *on the condition that my present essay be sold with it at the same time, because this latest one serves as an explication of several of the questionable and easily misunderstood remarks found in the two earlier essays* (or whichever other middle course their wisdom suggests). Let this order not be treated, as usually happens, as a secret, but rather let it be publicly proclaimed, and I will honor their magnanimity with my gratitude.

I appeal to unprejudiced readers who have neither acted in this affair nor taken sides for or against the opinions that have been disputed here. The purpose of my essay was to raise these unprejudiced people to the level of a public audience for this affair and to make them my judge.⁹³ Only the unprejudiced—for as little as my opponents can claim to have a voice, just as little do I demand that the friends of the latest philosophy, and even of modern philosophy, be heard. The unprejudiced, however little they may follow my inferences, are still more or less in agreement with my principle, that of pure moralism.

⁹³ The “essay” is *Appeal to the Public*.

I have faithfully and clearly depicted the doctrine of my opponents, in accordance with which mine must seem atheistic to them, as well as my doctrine, in accordance with which theirs must seem idolatrous and blasphemous to me. It is now for these unprejudiced people to decide, first among themselves, and then, if they are willing, before others as well, whether or not the doctrine of my opponents seems so excellent and mine so dreadful; to decide according to which of the two they would rather see their own spiritual character educated; to decide (on the basis of this description) which one is more beneficial to their heart. Let them grant me but *one* such appeal to their heart, and then I will leave them quietly to their own contemplation.

<451> Through that doctrine they make you lascivious; through your lasciviousness, needy; through your neediness, dependent, small, and low. Your initial appearance for yourselves is indeed not too impressive. At first, you find yourselves as a product of the sensible world, chained to it because of your weakness, an immortal being in need of what is only dust and ash. There is only one way to free yourselves from this condition, elevation to pure morality; and you are destined and called to take this path. From the moment you set out on it, nature, your mistress heretofore, becomes subject to you and is transformed into your passively obedient instrument. But they wish to burn indelibly into your immortal spirit the memorial to your apparent origin in vanity by sanctioning and hallowing it. Since they do not allow appetite to be purged from you but rather cultivate it, and raise it to a place of honor, and keep a god busy with it, they perpetuate your neediness.

The other doctrine will, before your eyes, transform into nothing all that you are used to admiring, desiring, and fearing, because it eternally closes your breast to admiration, desire, and fear. You should raise yourselves only to the consciousness of your pure moral character; and you become, it promises you, you will find, who you are. You will find that this planet with all the splendors that you in your childish simplicity presume to need, that this sun, and the million suns that surround it, that all the planets that you surmise to be in orbit around each of these million suns, and the objects too numerous to grasp that you surmise to be on each of these heavenly bodies as you find them on your planet, that this immeasurable universe in its entirety, before the mere thought of which your sensible soul quakes and trembles down to its very foundations, that this planet is nothing in mortal eyes but a pale reflection of your own eternal existence, which is locked up inside of you and is to be developed eternally. You become, it promises you, a self-active principle, and exist only through your dutiful action—not dispensing with pleasure but rather scorning all that there is, finding the splendors of your planet, and of those million heavenly bodies, of that immeasurable universe in its entirety, before the mere thought of which your sensible soul quakes, finding them far beneath your own spiritual nature, and holding love and being touched by it as a blot on and a desecration of your higher status. You will, it promises you, boldly compare your infinitude <452> to the immeasurable universe, before the mere thought of which your sensible soul quakes, and say: “How could I fear you

power, which is directed only at what is equal to you and never extends to me? *You* are changeable, not *I*. All your transformations are only a stage play to me, and I will always float unscathed above the ruins of your forms. That even now there are forces at work that are supposed to destroy the inner sphere of my activity, which I call my body, does not appear strange to me. This body belongs to you; it is transitory, as is everything that belongs to you. But I am not this body. I myself will float over its ruins, and its dissolution will be a stage play to me. That there are already forces at work that will destroy my outer sphere, which has only just begun to have any proximate effect, does not appear strange to me; these are the forces that will destroy you all, you shining suns, and the million heavenly bodies revolving around you. Because of your birth you are doomed to die. But once, beneath the million suns shining above my head, the last born of their final sparks of light have long since streamed forth, I will still be, unscathed and unchanged, the same as who I am now. And if as many new solar systems are assembled from your ruins, you suns shining above my head, and once the last of their final sparks of light have long since streamed forth, I will still be, unscathed and unchanged, the same as who I am today.⁹⁴ I will still will what I will today, namely, my duty; and the consequences of my actions and sufferings will still exist, preserved in the beatitude of all people.” You should, this doctrine promises you, also stand there in your maternal land, before the supersensible world and God, free and upright. You are not His slaves, but rather the free fellow-citizens of His realm. The same law that binds you constitutes His being just as it constitutes your will. Even in contrast to Him you are not needy, for you desire nothing except what He does without your desire; you are not even dependent on Him, for you do not differentiate your will from His. “You receive divinity in your will, and it descends to you from its terrestrial throne.”⁹⁵

And now you, the still impartial and unprejudiced readers, have to decide, on your own, according to which of these two doctrines you wish to be educated, whether according to the one that debases you, or whether according to the one that promises to elevate you indescribably. How the first doctrine affects a human mind, <453> you will already without a doubt have sensed in yourselves. We have all sensed it, for up to now we have all been forced to pass through this mode of thought. Whether or not the second doctrine will keep its grand promises, you can certainly judge in part by means of imagination and reflection, unless both are at your disposal to a completely common degree. But you can arrive at a true conviction about it only by actually doing what it demands of you. These descriptions might stimulate a great many of you to make the attempt in your own

⁹⁴ This paragraph paraphrases part of Fichte’s “Bruchstück einer Predigt” [“Fragment of a Sermon”] (GA, II, 2, pp. 319–20).

⁹⁵ Fichte alters this line from “Das Ideal und das Leben” (1796) by Johann Christoph Friedrich (von) Schiller (1759–1805), which reads “Nehmt die Gottheit auf in euren Willen, Und sie steigt von ihrem Weltenthron.”

heart. If you make it in the right way and find yourselves disappointed, then damn me as you please.

And with that I lay down my pen in the peace of mind with which I hope one day to lay down my earthly labor as a whole and to cross over into eternity. To say what I have said here was my concern. What will happen now is someone else's concern.

Endnotes

* In particular: *his defense against Mendelssohn* in *Letters on the Doctrine of Spinoza*, 2nd edition, pp. 234 ff. [*Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza* (Breslau, 1785)—later published in *Neue vermehrte Ausgabe* Breslau (1789)] and similarly in all his writings.

** It seems that they now wish to conceal this. In one attestation, which I have in my hands, and which was drawn up in the name of this commission and signed by the book inspector Mechau, it is said that the first and second essays (which, however, are bound together with a third essay and are nowhere to be found separately) of the first issue are to be sought out in the bookstores. According to the same attestation, the rescript contains the statement that these two essays contain the crudest atheistic pronouncements. {Editor's Comment: Due to a misunderstanding, an announcement was made that the confiscation order applied to the first and second issues of the journal—*Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten* Vol. VIII, No. 1 and No. 2 (Jena/Leipzig: Gabler, 1798)—rather than to the first and second essays in the first issue of the journal—"Ueber den Grund unsers Glaubens an eine göttliche Weltregiurung" and "Entwicklung des Begriffs der Religion" in *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten* Vol. VIII, No. 1 (Jena/Leipzig: Gabler, 1798). Apparently the president of the Leipzig book commission never officially ordered the confiscation of the second issue of the *Philosophisches Journal*. The attestation to which Fichte refers was signed by the book inspector Simon Gottlieb Mechau (1741–1810) and appears to be directed to the book dealer Christian Ernst Gabler (1770–1820). See "Berichtigung einer Berichtigung" ["Correction of a Correction"] (GA, I, 5, p. 371) in which Fichte quotes the president of the book commission—Johann Georg Eck (1745–1808)—who says that only the confiscation only applies to the first and second essays of the first issue of the *Philosophisches Journal* and not to the entire first issue of the journal. Some of the published announcements of the confiscation order described Fichte's and Forbergs essays as containing "the crudest atheistic pronouncements."}

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Chapter 6

K. L. Reinhold: “Letter to Fichte”

Commentary

When J. G. Fichte’s *Appeal to the Public* appeared in January of 1799, it had the dubious virtue of offending not only the obscurantist sensitivities of the political reactionaries and religious conservatives but also the enlightened predilections of the academic liberals and literary moderates.¹ During the next two months, J. K. Lavater and F. H. Jacobi sent highly critical letters to Fichte wherein they accused him of positing “a concept, a thing of thought, a generality, in lieu of the living God.”² K. L. Reinhold’s “Letter to Fichte,” a dense and Byzantine, yet strangely elegant, brief, responds to Fichte’s *Appeal* and to Lavater and Jacobi’s charge.³ While Reinhold was penning this attempted mediation between the fideists, pietists and idealists, Fichte’s *Juridical Defense* was rejected and Fichte was dismissed from the University of Jena.⁴

Reinhold’s life was characterized by a personal history of enthusiastic conversions and by an inexhaustible devotion to cultivating enlightenment, which

¹ *Appeal to the Public* (pp. 92–125 [GA, I, 5, pp. 415–53]) was published on 15 January 1799.

² *Jacobi to Fichte*, MPW, pp. 497–536 (GA, III, 3, p. 224–81) and “Johann Kaspar Lavater an Fichte” [“Johann Kaspar Lavater to Fichte”] of 7–12 February 1799 (GA, III, 3, pp. 187–93); the quotation is from MPW, p. 534 (GA, III, 3, p. 252). Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743–1819) sent his letter to Fichte on 21 March 1799 and Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741–1801) sent his letter to Fichte on 12 February 1799. Jacobi later published his letter as the pamphlet *Jacobi an Fichte [Jacobi to Fichte]* (Hamburg: Perthes, 1799). Fichte responded to Lavater in “Fichte an Johann Kaspar Lavater” [“Fichte to Johann Kaspar Lavater”] of 7 March 1799, (GA, III, 3, pp. 208–209, No. 420). Fichte responded to Jacobi in “To Reinhold” and the appended “Fragment,” EPW, pp. 428–37 (GA, III, 3, pp. 325–33, No. 440); J. G. Fichte: “From a Private Letter,” pp. 252–67 (GA, I, 6, pp. 369–89); J. G. Fichte: “Concluding Remark by the Editor,” pp. 276–81 (GA, I, 6, pp. 411–14); and “Knowledge,” the second book of VM.

³ Karl Leonhard Reinhold (1757–1823) sent his “Letter to Fichte” on 6 April 1799 (“Karl Leonhard Reinhold an Fichte” of 27 March–6 April 1799, [GA, III, 3, pp. 307–20, No. 436.I]). Reinhold later published his letter as a pamphlet: *Sendschreiben an J. C. Lavater und J. G. Fichte über den Glauben an Gott [Circular Letter to J. C. Lavater and J. G. Fichte about the Belief in God]* (Hamburg: Perthes, 1799).

⁴ Fichte had submitted his *Juridical Defense* (pp. 157–204 [GA, I, 6, pp. 26–84]) to the courts of the patrons of the University of Jena on 18 March 1799. He was dismissed on 1 April 1799.

he conceived as a project of ethical and religious reform.⁵ Although he was Fichte's predecessor in Jena, Reinhold had adopted Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* as his own philosophy in 1798.⁶ He was already attracted to Jacobi's non-philosophy in 1799.⁷ When Reinhold wrote his "Letter to Fichte," he was attempting to find a "third way" between the "pure knowledge" of Fichte and the "non-knowledge" of Jacobi.⁸ Jacobi was a novelist and critic with a fideistic bent, who ran a literary salon with his wife, the literati's darling "Betty," at their home in Pempelfort.⁹ The younger philosophers Reinhold and Fichte respected the elder Jacobi, regarding him as a willing friend, and as an unwitting ally of their version of transcendental idealism. Fichte had solicited Jacobi's assistance in his *Appeal*, and initially, both Fichte

⁵ In his youth, Reinhold studied as a Jesuit, but became a Barnabite when the order was suppressed in 1773. In 1783, having served briefly as a Barnabite monk, priest, and philosophy teacher, Reinhold moved to Leipzig and converted to Protestantism. In 1784, he moved to Weimar, and began collaborating on *Der teutscher Merkur* with its founder C. M. Wieland, (1733–1813), who was also his father-in-law. In 1786, he published *Briefe Ueber die Kantische Philosophie 1886* [*Letters on the Kantian Philosophy 1886*] (Leipzig: Reclam, 1921). In 1787, he became the first occupant of a new chair in critical philosophy at the University of Jena. While in Jena, he developed his own version of transcendental idealism, which he called *Elementär Philosophie*, or the philosophy of the elements: *Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens 1789* [*Attempt at a New Theory of the Human Power of Representation 1789*] (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963); *Beyträge zur Berichtigung bisheriger Missverständnisse der Philosophen 1790* [*Contributions toward Correcting the Previous Misunderstandings of Philosophers 1790*] (Hamburg, Meiner, 2003); *Ueber das Fundament des philosophischen Wissens 1791* [*On the Foundation of Philosophical Knowledge 1791*] (Hamburg: Meiner, 1978), translated in English in *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, (ed. and trans.) George di Giovanni and H. S. Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), pp. 54–103. After brief adoptions of Fichte's and then Jacobi's ideas, in 1801, Reinhold accepted the philosophy of Christoph Gottfried Bardili (1761–1808), which was purportedly based on pure logic, or "thinking qua thinking." In the middle 1800s, he abandoned Bardili's system and tried to develop his own philosophy articulated from the "standpoint of language." Despite Reinhold's transformations through many different philosophical positions, his presupposition that philosophy should affect and improve human life unified his life-long philosophical quest.

⁶ Reinhold's tribute to the *Wissenschaftslehre* was recorded in *Ueber die Paradoxien der neuesten Philosophie* [*Concerning the Paradoxes of the Newest Philosophy*] (Hamburg: 1799).

⁷ Jacobi referred to his position as a non-philosophy that produces non-knowledge (*Jacobi to Fichte*, MPW, pp. 501 and 505 [GA, III, 3, pp. 226 and 231]).

⁸ Reinhold called Fichte's philosophy pure knowledge, or pure knowing. Reinhold had recently visited Jacobi in Eutin, where they discussed precisely this issue of a third way. However, Reinhold still referred to the accusations against Fichte as "my own affair" and as an attack on "our philosophy" ("Letter to Fichte," pp. 134–36 [GA, III, 3, pp. 308–309, No. 436.I]).

⁹ Elisabeth "Betty" von Clermont (1742–1784).

and Reinhold perceived Jacobi's letter as supportive; but they would soon realize that Jacobi's letter, which he published as *Jacobi to Fichte*, was unsympathetic and reproachful, condemning the *Wissenschaftslehre* for presumption, egoism, nihilism, and atheism.¹⁰

In his "Letter to Fichte," Reinhold presents a curious but concise and exact synopsis of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, which displays a deep comprehension of both Fichte's and Jacobi's positions as well as a firm grasp on Jacobi's essential misunderstanding of Fichte's philosophy.¹¹ Jacobi claims that Fichte is the "messiah of speculative reason" and that the *Wissenschaftslehre* is the archetypal philosophy, namely a "pure," and "thoroughly immanent" philosophy "of one piece," "a veritable system of reason," and the consummate "only possible" science of truth.¹² However, precisely for these reasons, Jacobi denounces the *Wissenschaftslehre*. For Jacobi, *truth* and *reality* derive from concepts produced through abstraction and reflection by the finite human understanding; whereas the infinite, incomprehensible *true* and *real* generates all rationality and reality, which is only intimated by feeling and faith. Jacobi's objection to the *Wissenschaftslehre* is that Fichte, as a philosopher, would incorporate the "foundation of all truth" within his system of knowledge, but that Jacobi, as a non-philosopher, would hold "this foundation (the *true* itself)," or God, as a sacred object of faith, or non-knowing, beyond the truths and knowledge of finite human understanding, or *mere* reason.¹³ Reinhold's main goal in his "Letter to Fichte" is to show that Jacobi's standpoint of non-knowing and faith is identical to Fichte's standpoint of life and belief.¹⁴

In his "Letter to Fichte," Reinhold claims that Jacobi's God, the true and real in itself—Reinhold's "*infinite in infinitum*"—is the object of Fichte's belief and real intellectual intuition—Reinhold's "*principle of complete certainty*"—and is the foundation of Jacobi's non-system of non-knowing to which Fichte's "system of *pure knowing* points."¹⁵ Consequently, for Fichte, Jacobi, and Reinhold, the *infinite in infinitum* is the extra-philosophical source of all finite reason and finite

¹⁰ *Appeal to the Public*, pp. 120–22 (GA, I, 5, pp. 447–48); "Letter to Fichte," pp. 134–35 (GA, III, 3, p. 308, No. 436.I); and *Jacobi to Fichte*, MPW, pp. 503–506, 523–26, 524–26 (GA III, 3, pp. 228–31, 250–53, 251–53).

¹¹ It is highly probably that Reinhold understood both Fichte and Jacobi better than most of their contemporaries, so it is worth the reader's effort to decipher the peculiar literary style and philosophical terminology he employs in his "Letter to Fichte."

¹² *Jacobi to Fichte*, MPW, pp. 501–506 (GA III, 3, pp. 227–31). This concept of science was first proposed by Reinhold in *Ueber das Fundament des philosophischen Wissens*, 1791. In this work, Reinhold made his most important contribution to critical philosophy: a detailed reflection on philosophical task and method, which led to his formulation of the principle of consciousness as the foundation of philosophy.

¹³ *Jacobi to Fichte*, MPW, pp. 505–506 (GA, III, 3, pp. 231–32).

¹⁴ "Letter to Fichte," pp. 134–35 (GA, III, 3, p. 308, No. 436.I).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

reality, which ordinary human consciousness, or natural reason, grasps through revelation as the original object of faith at Fichte's standpoint of life—Reinhold's "standpoint of conscience."¹⁶

Reinhold argues that the true and real is manifest to natural consciousness through feeling at the standpoint of conscience.¹⁷ This feeling of true reality is the source of all finite rationality and reality.¹⁸ In part, true reality is manifest as sensible perception and thinking in experience and, in part, it is manifest as supersensible perception and faith in conscience.¹⁹ Reinhold says that natural consciousness, or natural reason, becomes aware of empirical reality, or nature, "*the finite in infinitum*," through sensible perception; whereas natural reason, becomes aware of God, *the infinite in infinitum*, through supersensible perception, or real intellectual intuition, Reinhold's "principle of complete certainty."²⁰ Sensible perception and thinking constitute the realm of natural science; and supersensible perception and faith constitute the realm of revelation, or morality and religion. Sensible intuition reveals man to himself as natural, "*the finite in the finite*."²¹ *Real intellectual intuition, or original moral-religious feeling, "the infinite in the finite,"* reveals man to himself as free, and thus man discovers himself as something finite connected to the infinite.²²

According to Reinhold, the philosopher, at the standpoint of philosophy, or speculation, abstracts from the finite reality and the finite freedom (and its connection to the infinite) that are conjoined in natural consciousness.²³ The philosopher abstracts from the original sensible intuition of nature, and posits this abstracted, isolated concept of nature (the not-I or artificial nature) as the "*tendency of the finite to the finite in infinitum*."²⁴ The philosophically posited not-I becomes the object of empirical science, or natural philosophy.²⁵ Reinhold claims that the philosopher abstracts from the real, original intellectual intuition of

¹⁶ "Letter to Fichte," pp. 134–35 (GA, III, 3, p. 308, No. 436.I). See "Commentator's Introduction" on the standpoint of life (pp. 9–12).

¹⁷ "Letter to Fichte," pp. 138–40 (GA, III, 3, p. 315, No. 436.I). The reality of both the sensible and the supersensible worlds is given through feeling. The reality of the supersensible world is given through supersensible feeling. The reality of the sensible world is given through sensible feeling, which is confirmed by supersensible feeling ("Letter to Fichte," pp. 138–40 [GA, III, 3, pp. 314–15, No. 436.I])

¹⁸ "Letter to Fichte," pp. 138–40 (GA, III, 3, p. 315, No. 436.I).

¹⁹ "Letter to Fichte," pp. 138–39 (GA, III, 3, p. 314, No. 436.I).

²⁰ "Letter to Fichte," pp. 138–39 (GA, III, 3, p. 314, No. 436.I). See "Commentator's Introduction" on real intellectual intuition (pp. 11–14).

²¹ "Letter to Fichte," pp. 134–37 (GA, III, 3, pp. 308 and 311–12, No. 436.I).

²² Ibid.

²³ "Letter to Fichte," pp. 136–38 (GA, III, 3, pp. 311–13, No. 436.I). See "Commentator's Introduction" on the standpoint of philosophy (pp. 11–14).

²⁴ "Letter to Fichte," pp. 136–38 (GA, III, 3, pp. 313–15, No. 436.I).

²⁵ "Letter to Fichte," pp. 139–40 (GA, III, 3, p. 315, No. 436.I).

freedom, and posits this abstracted, isolated concept of freedom (the I or artificial consciousness) as a philosophical intellectual intuition, the "*tendency in infinitum of the finite toward the infinite*."²⁶ The philosophically posited I becomes the object of pure transcendental science, or theoretical philosophy.²⁷

Reinhold explains that the philosopher, at the standpoint of speculation, reflects on the infinite self-reverting activity of the I.²⁸ According to the principle of determinability, the philosopher conceives the I's activity as something specific (or determinate) in contrast to something general (or determinable), thereby generating an artificial duality (which copies the duality of natural consciousness) of finite and infinite: real (objective) and ideal (subjective) thinking, and ideal (conceptualizing or theoretical) and real (practical) activity.²⁹ Thus, Reinhold says, the I is regarded as finite and infinite in different respects: it is "*comprehensible in infinitum*" in terms of its theoretical (ideal) activity (of conceptualizing)—infinite thinking about the finite—and it is "*incomprehensible in infinitum*" in terms of its practical (real) activity—finite thinking about the infinite.³⁰

According to Reinhold, the philosopher, in order to make the theoretical activity of the I *comprehensible in infinitum* and thereby, to account for theoretical knowledge, must presuppose the practical activity of the I as *incomprehensible in infinitum*, or as a philosophical hypothesis.³¹ For the philosopher, this "philosophical belief" in the practical activity of the I—that is, the hypothesis of an artificial freedom and its self-limitation according to an artificial (moral) law of freedom—becomes the object of pure practical science, or practical philosophy. For the philosopher, the moral law is "the law of the universe" and the universe is simply "*finite freedom in infinitum with its finite productions*."³² However,

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ "Letter to Fichte," pp. 139–40 (GA, III, 3, pp. 315, No. 436.I). The terms "I", "not-I", and "positing" were employed in Fichte's *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre, 1794* [Groundwork of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre, (1794)] (GA, I, 2, p. 250–451), the only written presentation of the foundations of the *Wissenschaftslehre* to which Reinhold had access. The notion of positing may be understood as asserting: The philosopher posits, or asserts, the I and the not-I.

²⁸ See "Commentator's Introduction" on the philosophical intellectual intuition (pp. 9–11).

²⁹ "Letter to Fichte," pp. 138–40 (GA, III, 3, pp. 313–15, No. 436.I). See "Commentator's Introduction" on the principle of determinability (p. 10).

³⁰ In other words, the origin of objective concepts of things from the activity and limitation of the I can be explained, but neither the origin of the I's activity nor the origin of its limitation can be explained ("Letter to Fichte," pp. 141–42 [GA, III, 3, p. 318, No. 436.I]). In this passage, Reinhold relies on the language and methodology of the *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794) (GA, I, 2, p. 250–451), but his discussion also points to Fichte's discussion of the incomprehensible limits on freedom in "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," pp. 26–27 (GA, I, 5, pp. 354–55).

³¹ "Letter to Fichte," pp. 141–42 (GA, III, 3, p. 318, No. 436.I).

³² Ibid..

Reinhold argues, the philosopher does not first become actually aware of this law as a “philosophical belief” at the standpoint of speculation; but rather, the philosopher, as a man, first becomes actually aware of this law as a real belief in the moral law, the moral will, and the moral world order at the standpoint of conscience.³³ The philosopher presupposes this real belief, because otherwise the mere reason of his philosophy would conflict with his natural reason and would lack any justification at the standpoint of conscience.³⁴

Consequently, Reinhold concludes, for man, at the standpoint of conscience, God and faith are revealed through original moral-religious feeling, real intellectual intuition. For the philosopher, at the standpoint of speculation, the moral world-order and man’s belief therein, which is united with man’s consciousness of the moral law, become the objects of pure science of religion, or philosophy of religion.³⁵ Within the philosophy of religion, God is objectively, this moral order, and subjectively, belief in the moral order; but this belief is no more real, living faith and this order is no more the real, living God than philosophy of religion is the real practice of living religion. This implies, for Reinhold, that the philosopher must conceive and describe the objects of real, living religion as objects of knowledge to the extent that he can comprehend them, but without an original connection to moral-religious feeling, these products of pure knowing, or mere speculation, would be chimeras of mere, *empty* speculation.³⁶

In Reinhold’s bizarre, succinct “Letter to Fichte,” he shows that Fichte regards sensible and supersensible intuition as two aspects of one revelation of true reality. Likewise, he demonstrates that Fichte’s philosophical intellectual intuition is an abstraction from his real intellectual intuition, which is ultimately justified by faith.³⁷ In the “Letter to Fichte,” Reinhold identifies the main misunderstanding that leads “feeble” and “heterodox believers”—as well as the non-feeble, relatively orthodox Jacobi—to find atheism in the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Like Fichte, he believes that such feeble thinkers conflate God with the absolute freedom of the philosophical I, which in turn, they confuse with the original finite freedom of the individual personality; and so, they suppose that the *Wissenschaftslehre*

³³ Ibid. “Striving to maintain this belief *alongside* that knowledge and to keep it *practically independent* of the latter, *without* treading too closely to *speculative* independence of that knowledge, is just the most distinguished business of *actual practical*, and not merely scientific, *philosophy*” (“Letter to Fichte,” pp. 135–36 [GA, III, 3, p. 309, No. 436.I]).

³⁴ “Letter to Fichte,” pp. 141 and 143 (GA, III, 3, pp. 317 and 320, No. 436.I). In other words, philosophical intellectual intuition is an abstraction from real intellectual intuition (“Letter to Fichte,” pp. 136–38 [GA, III, 3, pp. 310–12, No. 436.I]). See “Commentator’s Introduction” on the real intellectual intuition as the extra-philosophical sanction of the philosophical concept of I-hood (pp. 11–14).

³⁵ “Letter to Fichte,” p. 143 (GA, III, 3, p. 320, No. 436.I).

³⁶ “Letter to Fichte,” pp. 134–35 and 143 (GA, III, 3, pp. 308 and 320, No. 436.I).

³⁷ “Letter to Fichte,” pp. 136–40 (GA, III, 3, pp. 310–12 and 314–15, No. 436.I).

substitutes a mere concept of finite human freedom for the real infinite efficacy of God.³⁸ Consequently, Reinhold proves that Jacobi has no good cause for objecting to the *Wissenschaftslehre*, because Fichte regards belief as independent of knowledge but knowledge as dependent on belief: The non-philosopher takes faith in the intellectual intuition of supersensible reality as self-sufficient (and thus, takes sensible intuition as justified by supersensible reality) and the transcendental philosopher presupposes the content of these intuitions as the philosophical content of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, and presupposes the self-sufficiency of this faith as the extra-philosophical sanction of the *Wissenschaftslehre*.³⁹

When Fichte received Reinhold's letter, he had already been notified of his dismissal from the University of Jena. As the Weimar Court of Duke Karl August approached the Ernestine Courts of the other patrons of the University of Jena to solicit the proper rescripts approving Fichte's discharge, Fichte prepared to answer Jacobi's criticism of the *Wissenschaftslehre* and to publish his *Juridical Defense*.⁴⁰ Reinhold also published his "Letter to Fichte."⁴¹ Just as the *Juridical Defense* neglected to satisfy the enlightened nobility, so Reinhold's "Letter to Fichte" failed to appease the pietists, fideists, and idealists, but it was a small, desperately needed expression of confidence and support for Fichte at that lowest juncture of the atheism dispute.

³⁸ "Letter to Fichte," p. 141 (GA, III, 3, p. 317, No. 436.I). Compare "From a Private Letter," pp. 256–58 and 264–65 (GA, I, 6, pp. 372–73 and 382).

³⁹ "Letter to Fichte," pp. 135–36 (GA, III, 3, pp. 309 and 319, No. 436.I).

⁴⁰ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 157–205 (GA, I, 6, pp. 26–84). For details about the collaboration between the court of Karl August (1757–1828) Duke of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach, the Ernestine Courts, and the University of Jena in Fichte's coerced resignation, see Commentary on "Saxon Requisition Letter to the Weimar Court" and "Weimar Rescript to the University of Jena" (pp. 77–82) and on "Gotha Rescript to the University of Jena" (pp. 207–14). Fichte's *Juridical Defense* was originally submitted to Karl August and the other Ernestine Dukes; it was only published after Fichte's dismissal from Jena.

⁴¹ *Sendschreiben an J. C. Lavater und J. G. Fichte über den Glauben an Gott [Circular Letter to J. C. Lavater and J. G. Fichte about the Belief in God]* (Hamburg: Perthes, 1799).

Text: “Letter to Fichte”

<GA, III, 3, p. 307>

Eutin, March 27

Your last letter, my esteemed friend, admittedly made me waver for a time in my intention, which your next to last letter awoke in me, to write to you during the holidays.⁴² Finally, however, the matter was settled by my decision to postpone what I would rather *say* to you until I had done what I felt myself so forcefully compelled to do after reading your *Appeal*.⁴³ Yesterday I sent off to Hamburg for printing the manuscript of an essay *on the paradoxes of the latest philosophy*; and today I am writing to *you*, because, since the arrival of *your* package, I have thought and written about almost nothing but *your affair*, which is very much *my own* as well.⁴⁴

While I was *in Kiel* pondering over the *paradox* that *your* philosophy presents and must present to *common sense* (but which is heightened by the *half-philosophy* of our dogmatists and skeptics to an *absurd* and *tiresome* degree) and testing whether and what <308> *I* would be able to contribute to explaining and lessening it, *Jacobi* was *in Eutin* writing his incomparable open letter to *you*, in which it seems to me that this paradox is dissolved forever and, because it is pushed to its final *extreme*, *annihilates* itself.⁴⁵ Although *he* in his *letter* and *I* in my *essay* seemed, strictly speaking, to aim at distancing ourselves as philosophers as definitely and as far as possible from each other, we both concur on the very *point* that has heretofore really kept us *apart* (but at least without *my* knowledge) and will from now on forever *unite* us.⁴⁶ I have personally been in Eutin for several days, and every conversation with *Jacobi* makes clearer to me that I must take up my standpoint between *him* and *you* if I am to understand *you* and, *at the same time*, *myself completely*. *He* has completely freed my imagination, which was in part still bound by the *letter* of the *Kantian* edifice that I occupied for so long and revised with such difficulty. Through *him* I have become more intimately acquainted with the spirit of your philosophy, just as I became more intimately acquainted with the spirit of the *Kantian* philosophy through *you*; and now, ever since I have understood what *he* calls his *non-knowing* and have sympathized with it wholeheartedly, I hope to continue all the more freely and securely on the path of *speculative knowledge* opened to me *by you*.⁴⁷

⁴² See GA, III, 3, p. 178, No. 406.2.

⁴³ *Appeal to the Public*, pp. 92–125 (GA, I 5, pp. 415–53).

⁴⁴ K. L. Reinhold's *Ueber die Paradoxien der neuesten Philosophie* (1799).

⁴⁵ F. H. Jacobi's *Jacobi to Fichte*, MPW, pp. 497–536 (GA, III, 3, pp. 224–55).

⁴⁶ Reinhold's *Ueber die Paradoxien der neuesten Philosophie* (1799).

⁴⁷ Reinhold is alluding to the biblical passage “the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (2 Corinthians 3: 6). Earlier in his career, Reinhold had attempted to save the “spirit” of Kant's philosophy by sacrificing its “letter.” See Reinhold's declared intentions for his

In many places, and especially in *the essay* that has exposed you to the familiar accusation of *unbelief*, even *you* have explicitly affirmed this *non-knowing* (to which the entire well-known system of your *pure knowing* points) under the name of *belief* and under the character of the *principle of complete certainty*.⁴⁸ It has become so much clearer to me through *Jacobi*, however, that even *philosophical knowledge*, notwithstanding all the self-sufficiency that it has *for* and *through* itself, nevertheless (and indeed even for the sake of that self-sufficiency) cannot do without the *belief* that is absolutely independent of it. I now know even more definitely that the **relation** of that belief to this knowledge is *not possible by means of philosophizing* in itself but rather only by means of the *use* that my *will* is to make of my merely *natural* knowledge, which has only been *purified* by means of my philosophizing; and I now know even more definitely that philosophical knowledge can be raised *above* the character of *mere speculation* only *by means of that relation* and can be combined with that *genuine reality* without which that very knowledge would be and would remain mere *invention* in the eye of the *orthodox believer* holding fast to *the belief that is the principle of complete certainty*.

<309> That *our philosophy* is in no way able to *produce that belief*, it already admits by its presupposing that very belief for its own possibility, by its promising only the *explication* thereof, and by its referring to this explication as the only possible *confirmation* of speculative knowledge *before sound common sense*. Philosophy explicates this belief *only to those* who *actually* have and keep it; and it explicates belief only because through its knowledge *in infinitum* it makes the *possibility* of belief comprehensible, without ever being able to *exhaust this possibility*, because its *real* knowledge is always contained only in a *finite sum* of previous advances. Therefore, for the philosopher who has *lost sight* of that belief, not just because of his *striving for knowledge* but also as a *human being*, the same *entirety of natural conviction*, which is *explicable in infinitum* for his *knowledge*, must remain *inexplicable in infinitum* for his *belief*.

Philosophy has to do with *mere knowledge* as such. It must abstract from all *real* belief if its knowledge is to concern us; and as long as the function of knowledge persists, the function of belief is impossible. The latter is *really possible* only in *man* as such. It can only be present *in man* and persist insofar as he is *not always* gripped by the *condition* of philosophizing, and insofar as he, as a man, preserves belief within himself, in a *pure and living* fashion, *alongside* his philosophy (and I would almost like to say *in spite of* his philosophy). Striving to maintain this belief *alongside* that knowledge and to keep it *practically independent* of the latter,

own system of critical philosophy in *Ueber das Fundament des philosophischen Wissen*, 1791 (Hamburg: Meiner, 1978), pp. 68–70.

⁴⁸ The essay that exposed Fichte to the accusation of unbelief was "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance" (pp. 21–29 [GA, I, 5, pp. 347–57]). By the "principle of complete certainty," Reinhold seems to indicate Fichte's idea of the real intellectual intuition of the moral law that is conjoined immediately with belief in freedom and the moral world order.

without treading too closely to *speculative* independence of that knowledge, is just the most distinguished business of *actual practical*, and not merely scientific, *philosophy*. Speculation is **sober** and remains so only as long as it does not obscure and confuse that belief; and it must obscure and confuse belief the moment it intervenes in *belief's territory*, which is independent of speculation. Since, as speculation, it aims at no conviction other than one that depends only on itself, it can **to that extent** *never grant* independence from itself to belief. Only *belief* itself can maintain this independence *for* and *through* itself by declaring knowledge (which for itself is *the sum of all things*) to be what it is for belief, to be *mere speculation*. Belief tears itself away from knowledge *by means of its own strength* and raises *man* **above** the *philosopher*; and while **the latter** strives to realize, by means of the self-determinations (which make progress in *infinimum*) <310> of his *artificial consciousness* (by grasping in *infinimum* for *infinite knowledge*), *the truth that is certain through itself and the certainty that is true through itself*, **the former** finds *the very same thing already realized* in his *belief*. He finds it realized *for the particular self-consciousness* that he calls *conscience*, realized for the benefit of *action* that is not knowledge but *is worth more than all knowledge*, and realized in the *unique feeling* for *real* but absolutely *incomprehensible infinitude*, which finite freedom *can never approach* by means of *any knowledge*, but which it should eternally approach by means of *conscientious action*.

This *absolutely incomprehensible* but also *absolutely real thing* is *God*; and the *feeling* by means of which it announces itself in our *conscience* is the *root* of conscience, the *primal source* of all *truth* and *rationality* in man. This feeling is *presupposed* by reason and can never be *produced* by it, never *copied* by it. Reason, as reason, *issues* from it alone, and only to it alone is reason indebted for its *true nature* and for *reality as a whole*, for which its *thinking of the finite in infinitum* has a capacity, whether such thinking is concerned with *experience outside of itself* or, as in *pure knowledge*, *with itself and in itself*. It must continually *orient* itself to *that feeling*, by means of which it is *originally constituted* as the *tendency in infinitum towards the infinite*, if it is not to lose itself in an *empty*, denatured infinitude, if it is not to lose *itself as true reason*. The philosopher *isolates* reason in order to test what reason as *mere reason* is able to do for itself and *through* itself, in order to *know how* and *what* it can *know*. By means of that isolation, he suspends its *reality as natural* reason and constitutes it in its artificial character. As *mere reason* it has now become for him *on the whole* a *mere tendency in infinitum*, which *comprehends the finite in infinitum*, but which therewith also ceases in *infinimum* to **discern** what is *really infinite* and *thereby itself*. That which is really infinite must *remain eternally hidden* to artificial reason, which only aims at *knowing* and *comprehending*, and *for which* there is nothing that cannot be known or comprehended. For artificial reason there **exists** nothing that is *infinite* but rather only a *finitude in infinitum*; for it there **exists** nothing that is *true in* and *through* itself but rather only *truth* for and *through speculating* reason; for it there **exists** no God but rather only *itself* in its *finite* <311> knowing. What is *really infinite*, what is *true in* and *through* itself—*God*—**exists** not for the *philosopher*

but only for *man*; **exists** not *in* and *through* knowledge but rather only *in* and *through* belief (and *in* that very belief, indeed *through* reason, but not *through* mere reason, and just as little in the *character* of mere reason); **exists** only *through* and *for* reason that is natural; **exists** not *through* and *for* reason that *merely* intuitis and thinks itself, that is active *between* nature and God, and that *comprehends* nature in *infinitum*, but **exists** *through* and *for* reason that *perceives* God and that *through* Him *perceives* itself; **exists** *through* and *for* reason that *receives* what is true in itself; and **exists** *through* and *for* reason that **takes in truth**, not *through* and *for* reason that **makes truth**.

Only through my *freedom* do I *myself* participate in *infinitude*. But I find my freedom *originally* **only** from the *standpoint of conscience*, from which *alone* I can *rediscover* it as **my** individual freedom after I have abstracted from my individuality by philosophizing on behalf of pure knowing and have consequently given up **my** freedom as such forever. *From the standpoint of conscience* I have not *even* *posited* myself; and I *cannot even* *posit* myself, but I know that I should muster *all that is in me* to maintain myself continually in this standpoint. Philosophy can no doubt illuminate in *infinitum* the *possibility of this* standpoint *from within itself*, but it can never exhaust this possibility; and still less does philosophy *really* *transplant* me into the standpoint of conscience. Even *nature as a whole*, which, within this standpoint, I feel and believe myself to be exalted above, is not able to do this. **God alone**, who *reveals* Himself to me in this standpoint, *has placed me in it* and thereby has shown me my *true being* and my *position between Him* and *mere nature*.

Kiel, April 6

Only through my freedom do I myself participate in infinitude. Therefore, how I originally find it in conscience <312> is as something finite to me but indissolubly connected with the infinite in an admittedly incomprehensible manner. From the standpoint of speculation I abstract from all that is real. Consequently, I also abstract from my real finitude and, by means of abstracting from my real finitude, also from the original and to that extent incomprehensible and indissoluble connection of my freedom with the infinite. There then remains to me nothing more than the mere freedom that becomes infinite through that abstraction (by means of which I have constituted it as mere freedom), but which through reflection on itself (by means of which I deliver it up without that abstraction and posit it artificially in my consciousness) at the same time again becomes finite. I now no longer possess **my** freedom as such but rather freedom in itself, in me and for me, which through artifice has raised itself above its original essence, above its nature, and has torn itself loose from the original connection of its finitude with the infinite. The infinitude and the finitude that now arise for the philosopher, and with which he has to deal from now on, are originally separate. This infinitude exists originally only through his free abstraction from what is real; this finitude exists only through his reflection on mere freedom. Both exist only for speculation, are separate only through it and for it, and should now be united again through it and for it. This

unification occurs by comprehending both in one and the same consciousness, by means of which freedom is itself established finitely in infinitum; and the unification of what is finite in freedom with what is infinite (as **something comprehensible** in infinitum) is established through itself. What the philosopher continually abolishes through free abstraction, he continually re-establishes through free reflection. What he abolishes through a single but continual act of abstraction is just the original and to that extent incomprehensible connection of the finite with the infinite, in which true being in itself, that which is originally real and true, is contained. What he re-establishes through acts of reflection repeated in infinitum is by no means the original, and as such, incomprehensible real and true in itself, <313> and can never become it; however, it is something true for itself and through itself in a finite knowing, the reproduction of what is true and incomprehensible in itself by means of what is comprehensible in infinitum. Through the continual and indissoluble abolition and re-establishing of what is real and true, there arises and subsists in the consciousness of the philosopher the absolute unification of the ideal and the real in genuinely philosophical speculation, which makes up the essence of pure knowing and which in this knowing is what is absolutely true for itself and through itself. This truth is nevertheless only speculative truth, is nothing but a philosophical, artificial knowing. What is originally true, **which** is **independent of knowledge**, is contained in that artificial knowing only insofar as it is reproduced and can be reproduced in infinitum by that knowing, and only to the extent that it can be presented, expounded, and represented by means of something comprehensible in infinitum. That which is absolutely incomprehensible and genuinely infinite—with which I find, by means of ethical-religious feeling, my freedom as something finite indissolubly united, and in which I believe by means of conscience—can never be found in that knowing, through which only something finite is established in infinitum.

The philosopher, therefore, *as philosopher*, knows nothing but *nature* and *mere nature* at that, the *essence* of which just consists of *finitude in infinitum*. He would necessarily have to be an *atheist* if he could be nothing *more* than a philosopher. It is *nature*, and *nothing* but nature, that he *produces* through his knowing and for his knowing, that he *produces* through his *imagination insofar as it acts in the mode of mere reason*. He knows about nature, but *only* about it, that it *can be* a posteriori nothing other than what it *must be* a priori for his knowing and through his knowing. *His knowing is to him as a philosopher the very same thing* that *nature in itself* is to him as a human being: *being through becoming in infinitum*. He would *exhaust nature* if he could exhaust *his knowing*. His knowing is something that *hovers eternally over nature*, a *consciousness that makes itself equal to finite being in infinitum*, to nature. His knowing is eternally *independent* of experience. It comes eternally *before* experience but also *only* before experience; and experience, but also only experience, *must* eternally *confirm* this. His knowing—once one wishes to consider speculative knowing *either* from the viewpoint of its origin in *abstraction* from what is *real* (which, consequently, must be prior to the *possibility* <314> of this abstraction and that knowing) or else from the viewpoint of absolutely free

reflection—is either a *faithful copy* or an *infallible archetype* of mere nature. To this it is limited by its entire essence. If no other pure conviction were possible besides *speculative, philosophical* conviction, then there could be *nothing but nature*; and if there were nothing but nature, then no other pure conviction besides *speculative, philosophical* conviction would be possible, a conviction that in itself is nothing but the pure yet never to be completed dissolution of the **empirical** into its elements.

But there is a **pure** conviction that is not the *speculative, philosophical* one; and [it is that] *God exists* and is *essentially different* from nature. The original connection of the finite with the infinite, from which the philosopher has abstracted in order to re-establish it by means of reflection, contains **more** than the **merely real** that he had *immediately* in view in his abstracting. If he has *reflected properly*, he has actually only abstracted from *sensible perception*; and what he regains from his reflections is only the pure truth that grounds *that perception as such*. That which is *true in itself*, or the original connection of the finite and the infinite, manifests itself in **natural consciousness partly** in mere experience, through *sensible perception* and the *thinking* that is related to it, as the *finite in infinitum*, as mere nature, but also **partly in conscience** by means of *supersensible perception* and the *belief* that is related to it, as the *infinite in the finite*, as *God*. As nature, what is *true in natural consciousness* is possible only for *experience*—that is, for knowing that consists of *sensible perceiving* extending in *infinitum* as well as the *thinking* that is related to it—so-called *empirical knowing*. As *God*, what is true in *natural consciousness* is possible only for *conscience*; and in conscience it is only possible for *belief*, which is grounded in a *supersensible*, original feeling that is incomprehensible in its origin: a feeling that neither nature nor our freedom was able to give to us, and that we must assume on account of the belief that results from it, as *something that is God-given*, as the *revelation of God in us*. To that extent this feeling is always *indissolubly* connected **with sensible perception** in natural consciousness, insofar as it continually *lifts* us **above** this very perception.

<315> The philosopher thus loses sight of *even that* feeling whenever and insofar as he abstracts from perception, not in order to act but rather to speculate. (*God* disappears for him at the same time *along with nature*.) Nevertheless, he also makes use of that feeling, be it *with* or without knowledge, whenever he refers to the *belief* in freedom, a belief that is independent of his philosophy, a belief that is *originally* present only *with* that feeling and *through* it.

For only in that feeling do I *originally* find myself free; and in it I find myself **to be so**, not, say, *because nature necessitates* me for the sake of the possibility of self-consciousness, or, say, *because I decided* to think myself **to be so** for the sake of *speculative knowing*, but rather **because** in the *power* of that feeling I can find myself as nothing other than free, and in that feeling **really** (i.e., *in the truth*) find myself free. And **only for this reason must** I oppose mere nature to myself, and think of myself as *free in opposition* to it. Only for this reason does **nature**—inside of me and outside of me—become for me the *tendency* of the *finite to the finite in infinitum*, and I become **for myself**, in *opposition* to nature, the

tendency of the finite **to the infinite**. Only for this reason **can** I finally—if I will, and if I *must* for the sake of speculation—by means of *free abstraction* (which, however, would be impossible without that *previous feeling*) absolutely, i.e., from *mere freedom*, regard and think of myself as *free*. Without that *original feeling*, which I neither owe to *nature* nor produce by means of speculation (but can only imitate), *empirical knowing* and *nature*, *pure knowing* and *freedom*, would exist for me just as little as *God* and *I myself*.

But I find my freedom in that feeling *only to the extent* that I *simultaneously* also find *God along with it*. I find my freedom *only through God*, and *only through it* do I find God in that feeling; and the *belief in freedom* grounded in that feeling is, as far as it is grounded in that feeling, *absolutely indissoluble* from *belief in God*. I can indeed never go **beyond** that feeling with *all of my thinking*. I can and may never **analyze** it without simultaneously *abolishing* along with it what is *real and true*, which is for me *only through and in* this feeling. But **in that feeling** I find my freedom <316> *only through another being* inseparable from it, through a *necessary being* that lifts me as *free above* all nature, that I necessarily distinguish from *all of nature* and to that extent find to be **of the same kind** as myself, that I also call *freedom* but nonetheless distinguish from my freedom (which as *finite in infinitum* is also **of the same kind as nature**) and find as the *infinite in infinitum*, as *supernatural reality*, and call *God*.

The *absolutely infinite* is for me the *absolutely incomprehensible* as well, but precisely *in and through* this incomprehensibility does the *absolutely real* exist for me. It **is** absolutely *for me*, insofar as I perceive it as what is incomprehensible. It **is not** *for me*, and I must abolish it, by striving to *comprehend* it, to turn it into *something comprehensible*. I know it, but I know it *only through the unique, incomprehensible, and inexpressible feeling* by means of which I perceive it *in myself* and *immediately* perceive through it my *better self*, and *in which it is, through its incomprehensible and indissoluble connection with me, the primal source of all truth*.

In itself—therefore, *regarded apart* from that feeling—the *absolutely infinite* is *nothing* and *less than nothing* for me. It is what is **absolutely indeterminable** and to that extent is not even **something thinkable**. I annihilate my *reason* when I set it **beyond myself**, or when I **imagine** an *infinite reason* different from mine and call it *holiness* or *God*. The essence of *reason* is the tendency of *something finite in infinitum towards the infinite*. Reason shares *being finite in infinitum* with *all of nature*; and only by means of the *infinite* (by means of *God*, who immediately constitutes it as a tendency towards *Himself*) is it *elevated* to a *supernatural status*. A *God* who is rational *in Himself* is an absurdity. But my reason is what is *divine* in me, insofar as it is not *mere reason*, and insofar as I perceive *God* *only through it* alone and it as *true reason* *only through God*. I can and must think the *infinite in infinitum*, which is **not thinkable in itself**, in *relation* to that original feeling; and I *really think* it, insofar as I, *necessitated* by that feeling, simply **presuppose** the *absolutely incomprehensible real ground* of my *original freedom* itself (which is *just for this reason* also the real ground of *all of what alone is thinkable as possible*

for my freedom and *through* my reason, <317> as possible for **all** my thinking and acting), of nature as a whole, of all my philosophical knowledge, in short, of all that is *finite and to that extent comprehensibly real*—that is, insofar as I **believe in God**.

God—as the *real ground* of all that is *positively thinkable* and (just for this reason) *finitely real* (consequently, to that extent the *real ground* of our freedom and reason itself as well), who is *positively* only *felt* and is *negatively* thought in relation to this feeling, who is not *posited* through thinking but only *presupposed* (that is, *believed*)—becomes **absolutely unthinkable** (self-contradictory, impossible) when one mistakes the *original* freedom revealed to us only *through conscience alone* for the *absolute freedom* that is real only *in, through, and for* speculation, and sets the latter in place of the former by *thinking God*. By means of this *misunderstanding*, the latest philosophy can turn *feeble believers* and *heterodox believers* into *atheists*. But whoever *correctly understands* this philosophy must realize and know *from it* that the *reality* of the *original* freedom is **presupposed** by the *absolute freedom* of the philosopher and is *explicable from and through the latter freedom only by means of and for* knowledge that progresses *in infinitum*; that if absolute and speculative freedom is *posited in place of* original and real freedom, there is *no belief* in freedom that speculation could *presuppose* for its *legitimation* before sound common sense; that there is *no belief* in freedom from which speculation could *proceed* and *turn into* knowledge; that, then, there is by no means *any truth except* through speculation and for speculation; that, then, the *reality* from which the philosopher must abstract *in infinitum* (in order to produce it, by means of his artificial reflections, for his knowledge *in infinitum*) is no **true reality**; and that his philosophy can consequently be nothing other than the **explication of natural appearance** by means of **artificial appearance**.

For reason that *philosophizes*, or, what means the same thing, for the *speculative use* of reason, *nothing* is real that is not real *through* it, and through it nothing is real except what it *comprehends*. For the philosopher, therefore, God (who for <318> *natural* reason and human beings as such is the *incomprehensible* and infinite real-ground of all that is comprehensible and finitely real) is *objectively* nothing but the *moral world-order* and *subjectively* nothing but the *belief in that very world-order*, which is *indissolubly* combined with the *consciousness of the moral law*, as you have admirably shown in your essay "On the Ground of our Belief in a Divine World-Governance."⁴⁹ Speculation does not *comprehend* that law at all without also simultaneously *presupposing* it as the *law of the universe*. But just as for speculation the entire universe is nothing more and nothing less than *finite freedom in infinitum in its infinite productions*, or reason employed with itself and through itself in pure knowledge, so for speculation that law of the universe is *in itself*

⁴⁹ Reinhold seems to be referring to "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance" (pp. 26–28 [GA, I, 5, pp. 354–55]), but the entire passage is very heavily influenced by Fichte's *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* 1794, (GA, I, 2, pp. 250–451).

nothing more than *one* of those productions and indeed is reason as it constitutes itself in the character of the *practical* and as it *presupposes* this character in all its other functions and on *their behalf*.

Speculation *explains belief in God* **only** insofar as it is explicable. By no means does speculation deduce **it** in *its reality* but rather only the concepts belonging to it. Speculation deduces its *possibility* insofar as this possibility is grounded in reason. Speculation deduces only *what is comprehensible* in it, and *to that extent everything* that is **explicable** in it (and *only* what is **explicable** in it) *as well*. The *belief* that speculation deduces is, **to the extent** that it deduces it, a mere *product of knowing*.

That is to say, *finite reason in infinitum* falls into contradiction with itself by tearing itself away from what is real—from *nature* and *God*—through artificial abstraction, and to that extent *deciding*, on behalf of *speculative*, i.e., pure, *knowledge, to be aware of nothing but itself*, and thereby necessarily becoming *for and through itself simultaneously comprehensible and incomprehensible in infinitum*. It *abolishes* this contradiction by **simultaneously** thinking of itself as *finite* and *infinite in different respects*; and this finitude and infinitude are **simultaneously unified in it to the extent** that it posits them for its *theoretical activity as comprehensible in infinitum* <319> but presupposes them for its *practical activity as absolutely incomprehensible in infinitum*.⁵⁰ But the *practical activity* and the *presupposing (believing)* that is indissoluble from it become necessary to finite reason **only because of the infinite knowledge** at which it alone aims. *It presupposes itself as incomprehensible in infinitum* in order to be able to posit itself as *comprehensible in infinitum* for its knowledge. It believes *only in order* to be able to know, and knows that it must believe *only for this reason*; its believing, like its knowing, is *mere speculation*—nothing but *artifice*.

Natural reason, on the contrary, *knows* only because and to the extent that it *believes*, and *believes not because* it knows and *in order that* it know but rather simply *because* it believes. Its believing is *absolutely self-sufficient*, and *it is itself only through believing*; and speculative knowing can prove its self-sufficiency **to natural reason** only by presupposing that self-sufficient belief. What is *true in itself* is given to natural reason in *immediate perception*. Natural reason *discerns* it without *comprehending* it. It believes it without being able to *think* it other than in *opposition* to all that is *finite in infinitum*. Yet *for natural reason*, in *that feeling* through which natural reason stands in immediate reciprocity with what is true in itself, what is true is *completely clear through itself*, is to natural reason the *single thing* that is *absolutely and originally clear* and illuminating *through itself*, is the *original light* of which the *light of pure* as well as *empirical* knowing is mere *reflection* and *through which alone reason discerns* itself and all else that is *in the true itself*. Hence the truth and certainty of what, not without cause, is *preferably called conscience*, in which man indeed *discerns* the true (*that which*

⁵⁰ Reinhold seems to be referring to Part II, §4 of Fichte's *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, 1794 (GA I, 2, pp. 283–384).

is certain *through itself*) and the certain (that which is *true* through itself) through *reason*—not, however, as *reason* but rather as the *voice* of God continually *calling* him to **freedom** in *rational action*, to a higher existence, to a better life, to godlikeness—and discerns all the more clearly the more he approaches this calling through his actions and conduct. This discerning and approaching, of course, is *his action*, but his action is at the same time a continual *receiving* from God—through whom *nature* as a whole, all that is finite in *infinitum*, has its existence, but through whom <320> *man* is elevated *above* nature, above all that is finite in *infinitum*, and is so elevated to the extent that *God reveals Himself to man*, thereby giving him reason, and through and with reason giving him the *feeling of his immediate dependence* on what is *infinite*, through which he is to become *independent of nature in infinitum*.

As a *philosopher*, man knows nothing about *God* except that *man* must believe in God if no contradiction should arise between his *speculative* and *natural* employment of reason; that, furthermore, this belief is possible for man only *by means of* reason and to that extent can and may contain absolutely *nothing contradictory* to reason; and that, finally, this belief, insofar as it can be derived from mere reason, must *only* be thought of as belief in the *moral world-order*. Man as philosopher knows this much about God; and the dissection of this knowledge is the philosophical *science of religion*. That, however, this belief (to the extent that it is present in *conscience* and through *conscientiousness* is present as *real, living* belief) is real, not through *mere* reason alone, neither through natural nor speculative reflection, but rather through *God Himself* by means of reason that *perceives God* in acting out of duty, and that this belief is *possible* only *insofar as* it is real—the philosopher as such knows nothing of this. He *believes* this as a human being, because and to the extent that the *original moral-religious feeling*, through which his *natural* reason is elevated **above** *speculative* reason, requires him to think of that belief in this fashion. Therefore, as a human being, he *believes* along with *Jacobi* that without this feeling his *pure knowing* would not only be **mere speculation**, which is *all* it *can* be anyway, but also **empty speculation**, which it *should* not be at all.

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Chapter 7

J. G. Fichte: Juridical Defense

Commentary

J. G. Fichte's *Juridical Defense* was the first part of Fichte and Friedrich Niethammer's *Juridical Defense of the Editors of the Philosophisches Journal Against the Accusation of Atheism* wherein the two editors of the *Philosophisches Journal* justified their decision to publish Fichte's "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World Governance" and F. K. Forberg's "Development of the Concept of Religion."¹ In March of 1799, Fichte and Niethammer sent their joint defense to Duke Karl August and to the other patrons of the University of Jena.² In June of

¹ *Der Herausgeber des Philosophischen Journals gerichtliche Verantwortungsschriften gegen die Anklage des Atheismus* [*Juridical Defense of the Editors of the Philosophisches Journal Against the Accusation of Atheism*] was divided into two parts, the first by Fichte, *J. G. Fichtes als Verfassers des ersten angeklagten Aufsatzes, und Mitherausgebers des Philosophischen Journals Verantwortungsschrift* [*J. G. Fichte's Defense as an Author of the First of the Accused Essays and as a Co-editor of the Philosophisches Journal*] and the second by his colleague and co-editor Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer (1766–1848), *Friedrich I. Niethammers als Mitherausgebers des Philosophischen Journals Verantwortungsschrift* [*Friedrich I. Niethammer's Defense as Co-Editor of the Philosophisches Journal*]. Fichte and Niethammer published their joint defense with a preface by Fichte as *Der Herausgeber des Philosophischen Journals gerichtliche Verantwortungsschriften gegen die Anklage des Atheismus* [*Juridical Defense of the Editors of the Philosophisches Journal Against the Accusation of Atheism*] (Jena: Gabler, 1799) (GA, I, 6, pp. 26–143). *J. G. Fichte: Juridical Defense*, pp. 157–204, is the translation of Fichte's part of the published joint defense (GA, I, pp. 26–84).

² On 18 December 1798, the Ernestine Dukes—who were patrons of the University of Jena—had received a letter from Friedrich August III (1750–1827), Elector of Saxony ("Kurfürstl. Sächsisches Requisitions-schreiben an die Herzöge der Ernestischen Höfe vom 18 December 1798" ["Electoral Saxon Requisition Letter to the Dukes of the Ernestine Courts" of 18 December 1798] in "Acta Die Confiscirung und Censur, ingleichen die Leipziger und andere Zeitungen btr. Vol. XII 1798–1800, Loc. 55 n. 8 der Geheimen Canzley in K. S. Hauptstaats-Archiv," p. 59) wherein Fichte's and Forberg's essays were described as atheistic and an investigation was demanded of Fichte and Niethammer's actions as editors. On 27 December 1798, Karl August (1757–1828), Duke of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach sent a letter to the senate of University of Jena demanding an investigation of Fichte's and Niethammer's actions as editors of the *Philosophisches Journal* ("Weimar Rescript to the University of Jena," p. 84 [FG, 6.1, p. 316, Number 702a]). On 10 January 1799, Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus (1761–1851), the prorector of the University of Jena, bade Fichte and Niethammer defend their actions (GA, III, 3, p. 171). On 18 March 1799, Fichte and

1799, after Fichte had been dismissed from his university position, he published this defense with a preface.³ Although Fichte struggled heroically to communicate with his superiors and peers in the *Juridical Defense*, the bold apology only increased his alienation from the various members of the enlightened nobility and the various representatives of the *Aufklärung*.

Fichte's *Juridical Defense* includes five Appendices: A, Fichte's *Appeal to the Public*;⁴ B, a statement by the theologian Gabler denying authorship of *A Father's Letter to his Student Son about Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism*;⁵ C, this same anonymously written *Father's Letter*;⁶ D, a pamphlet by Dyck, *On Herr Professor Fichte's Appeal to the Public, a Remark from the German Translation of the First Volume of Saint Lambert's Doctrine of Virtue*;⁷ E, an excerpt from the anonymously written *Something in Answer to A Father's Letter to his Student Son about Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism: Including Suggestions about the Harmony between the Religious Principles of Socrates, Anthonius, Jesus, Luther, Kant, Fichte, and Forberg*.⁸

Niethammer notified the Senate of the University of Jena that their defense had been sent directly to the courts of the patrons of the university (GA, III, 3, p. 217). For more details regarding the chronology of events surrounding *Der Herausgeber des Philosophischen Journals gerichtliche Verantwortungsschriften gegen die Anklage des Atheismus*, see FG, 5, pp. 272–78.

³ *Der Herausgeber des Philosophischen Journals gerichtliche Verantwortungsschriften gegen die Anklage des Atheismus* (Jena: Gabler, 1799) (GA, I, 6, pp. 26–143). Fichte and Niethammer published the defense at their own expense. By the time the defense was published, Fichte had been dismissed from his university position. For more details regarding the background and publication of the defense (as well as an account of initial reactions to it), see the remarks by the editors of GA (GA, I, 6, pp. 3–16).

⁴ *Appeal to the Public*, pp. 92–125 (GA, I, 5, pp. 415–53).

⁵ Johann Phillip Gabler (1753–1826), “Nothgedrungene Protestation gegen ein falsches Gerücht” [“Obligatory Protest against a False Rumor”] (GA, I, 6, pp. 119–20).

⁶ *Schreiben eines Vaters an seinen studierenden Sohn über den Fichtischen und Forbergischen Atheismus* [*A Father's Letter to his Student Son about Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism*] (G.: *A Father's Letter to his Student Son about Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism*, pp. 57–75 [GA, I, 6, pp. 121–38]).

⁷ Johann Gottfried Dyck (1750–1813), *Ueber des Herrn Professor Fichte Appellation an das Publikum, Eine Anmerkung aus der deutschen Uebersetzung des ersten Bandes von Saint-Lamberts Tugendkunst besonders abgedruckt* [*On Herr Professor Fichte's Appeal to the Public, a Remark from the German Translation of the First Volume of Saint Lambert's Doctrine of Virtue*] (GA I, 6, pp. 138–43).

⁸ An excerpt from *Etwas zur Antwort auf das Schreiben eines Vaters an seinem studierenden Sohn über den Fichtischen und Forbergischen Atheismus: Nebst Andeutungen der Harmonie einiger religiösen Grundsätze Sokrates, Antonins, Jesus, Luthers, Kants, Fichtes und Forbergs* [*Something in Answer to A Father's Letter to his Student Son about Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism: Including Suggestions about the Harmony between the Religious Principles of Socrates, Anthonius, Jesus, Luther, Kant, Fichte, and Forberg*] (Jena/Leipzig: Gabler, 1799) (GA, I, 6, p. 144).

Fichte and Niethammer were “censor-free” professors, that is, as representatives of the state and its university, they had been entrusted by the government—the court of Duke Karl August—to censor their own writings in their authorial capacity and others’ writings in their editorial capacity. Among other things, the constitutional, or state, law governing the behavior of state servants specified that irreligious and atheistic writings were not to be published, so Fichte and Niethammer were obliged to show diligent care as censors that irreligious and atheistic writings were not published in their journal, but they were also given authority as censors to determine that the writings published in their journal were not irreligious or atheistic. In their written defense, the two editors divided the responsibility to answer the charge of publishing atheistic essays, each providing his own “juridical defense.” Niethammer, speaking solely as an editor, defended their decision to publish the essays from the implicit accusation of editorial negligence.⁹ Fichte speaking both as an author of one of the accused essays and as an editor, defended the content of the essays from the explicit accusation of irreligion and atheism (and thereby, defended the editors’ decision from the implicit accusation of editorial error or negligence).¹⁰

In his *Juridical Defense*, Fichte addresses three main questions. Firstly, if the authors, Fichte and Forberg, and the editors, Fichte and Niethammer, were factually responsible for writing or publishing the accused essays, were they ethically or legally culpable for doing so?¹¹ Secondly, if the banned essays were not irreligious or atheistic, and thus, not ethically or legally objectionable, who was the original source of the false accusation that led to their confiscation?¹² Thirdly, if that original accusation was spurious, why had a wise and just government treated it as credible and thus banned the journal, condemned the authors, and called the editors to account?¹³

There was never any question of Fichte, Forberg, and Niethammer’s responsibility for writing or publishing the accused essays but only of their culpability for doing so, which raises another question: Wherein lies the fault of writing or publishing irreligious or atheistic essays?¹⁴ That such essays speak against religion? If there were a universally accepted religion, then writing against that religion would amount to an error that warranted logical or factual correction rather than moral or social censure; but since there is no universally accepted religion, anything written about religion opposes some religions and cannot be condemned ethically or prohibited legally without thus sanctioning all scripture

⁹ According to Niethammer’s view, an editor ought to practice censorial leniency with scholarly writings and censorial stringency with popular writings (GA I, 6, pp. 94–107).

¹⁰ Fichte discusses his approach as an editor and censor in his letter to Reinhold of 22 April 1799 (GA III, 3, pp. 325–30, No. 440).

¹¹ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 158–60 (GA, I, 6, p. 30).

¹² *Juridical Defense*, pp. 186–87 (GA, I, 6, p. 60).

¹³ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 193–94 (GA, I, 6, p. 70).

¹⁴ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 158–60 (GA, I, 6, p. 30).

and confession.¹⁵ If religion were grounded upon universally accepted principles of common sense or natural law, then writing against religion would amount to nonsense or aberrancy that inspired mirth or pity; but since there are no such principles, perversions of common sense or nature best remain for sense or nature to reproach.¹⁶ By and large, Fichte claims, reason and experience speak in favor of permitting religious dissent and thus, of allowing dissenters to discover their mistakes—should they be in the wrong—or to disclose their insights—should they be in the right.¹⁷

Fichte argues that if liable, he, Forberg, and Niethammer could only be so because they had violated some positive, or juridical, law against writing or publishing irreligious, atheistic essays.¹⁸ However, the juridical law of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach no more forbids writing against religion than it forbids erring about religion. Indeed, the civil law of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach—that is, those laws regulating the actions of individuals, qua subjects within the state—does not prohibit writing or printing irreligious, atheistic documents.¹⁹ Nonetheless, the constitutional law of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach—that is, those laws regulating the actions of state servants, qua representatives of the state, does explicitly command censoring irreligious, atheistic documents and thus, forbids publishing such documents. Authors, qua state subjects, cannot be liable for *writing* against religion; and university professors who edit journals, qua state representatives delegated to be censors, can be liable for *publishing* irreligious, atheistic documents; but “censor-free” university professors, qua state representatives entrusted to be censors and “self-censors,” are granted authority of *judging* that the documents they publish are not irreligious or atheistic.²⁰

It follows that Forberg is “quits with the law” and that Fichte and Niethammer are only accountable to their “own conscience, the learned public, and humanity.”²¹ Nonetheless, in order to show their worthiness of the trust that accompanied their academic positions, and thereby, to show the wisdom of the governments that entrusted them, Fichte defends the essays written by Fichte and Forberg, and published by Fichte and Niethammer, from the accusation of atheism.²² His defense

¹⁵ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 160–66 (GA, I, 6, pp. 31–36).

¹⁶ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 166–67 (GA, I, 6, pp. 36–37).

¹⁷ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 162–63 and 183–87 (GA, I, 6, pp. 33–34 and 57–60).

¹⁸ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 165–66 (GA, I, 6, p. 36).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 166–68 (GA, I, 6, pp. 36–39).

²¹ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 166–68 (GA, I, 6, pp. 37–38). Forberg is not only “quits” insofar as he is merely an author and not a representative of the government of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach but also insofar as he is a resident of Saalfeld and not a subject of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach.

²² *Juridical Defense*, pp. 167–68 (GA, I, 6, p. 38). Fichte attributes his interpretation of the censor’s role to the patrons of the university, who “would never have deviated from their own principles on their own initiative” if a “neighboring court”—the Dresden Court

necessarily involves an “external proof”—that is, an indirect demonstration that atheism (as defined by Fichte) cannot be derived from the essays—because no common definition of atheism has been proposed (by his opponents) against which to offer an “internal proof”—that is a direct refutation of specific characteristics of atheism.²³ This “external proof” depends on two “logical axioms,” or main presuppositions: (1) Denying specific determinations of the concept of God is not equivalent to denying the concept of God and thus, is not atheism; (2) Denying proofs of God’s existence is not equivalent to denying God’s existence and thus, is not atheism.²⁴

Fichte admits that the description of God in “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance” precludes certain characteristics, or determinations: specifically, corporeality, comprehensibility, and personality.²⁵ According to Fichte, our consciousness of God is intelligible rather than sensible, so God is not corporeal.²⁶ All consciousness involves awareness of intelligible, or supersensible, action and sensible matter.²⁷ The supersensible is simply immediately present to

of Friedrich August—which “values and observes entirely different principles regarding such a matter” had not issued a tacit reproach—in the “Electoral Saxon Requisition Letter to the Dukes of the Ernestine Courts” of 18 December 1798—of the principles of governance whereby the patrons “established a refuge for freedom of thought (which until recently was suppressed across well-nigh the entire surface of Europe), and have thereby rendered an everlasting service to the improvement of the human race.” Fichte, of course, is issuing his own tacit reproach of the patrons’ submission to the will of a foreign court (*Juridical Defense*, pp. 167–68 [GA, I, 6, pp. 38–39]). However, he hastens to add that his refutation of the charge of atheism is not directed against the author of the requisition letter or of the confiscation rescript—whether that author is the Elector or his government officials—but rather to an abstract intellect, a hypothetical opponent, who might have made the accusation of atheism expressed in the letter and rescript. (An announcement of the electoral rescript ordering the confiscation of the *Philosophisches Journal* was published in the *National-Zeitung der Deutschen*, Issue 51, 20 December 1798, col. 1039–40.; this announcement prefaces *Appeal to the Public*, pp. 92–125 [GA, I, 5, pp. 415–53].) This qualification specifies two parameters for Fichte’s refutation: (1) its attack is not directed toward any government authority but only toward faulty reasoning (2) its validity cannot be determined by any government authority but only by right reasoning (*Juridical Defense*, pp. 168–70 [GA, I, 6, pp. 39–42]).

²³ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 170–73 (GA, I, 6, pp. 42–44).

²⁴ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 172–73 and 179–80 (GA, I, 6, pp. 44 and 52).

²⁵ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 173–79 (GA, I, 6, pp. 45–51). Compare “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 26–29 (GA, I, 5, pp. 354–56) and *Appeal to the Public*, pp. 103–104 and 108–13 (GA, I, 5, pp. 428 and 434–38). See WLNK, pp. 173, 230–32, 295, and 418–19 (WLNK [K], pp. 66–67, 106–107, 144–45, and 210–11; WLNK [H], pp. 60–61, 96–98, 136–37, and 226–28).

²⁶ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 173–74 (GA, I, 6, pp. 45–46).

²⁷ This is to say, everything of which we are conscious can be reduced to either a variant of action or a variant of matter: I think about something particular and perceive a change in my inner activity, or intellect; I sense something particular and perceive a change

our minds through our own free activity of thinking and willing.²⁸ The sensible is simply the redescription, or representation, by our minds of inexplicable limits on our free activity that occur within the supersensible.²⁹ The supersensible is the ground of the sensible.³⁰ Our awareness of the supersensible and the sensible is an immediate cognition, or an intuition.³¹ We intellectually intuit supersensible activity, which we must conceive as extended through time, and we sensibly intuit sensible matter, which we must conceive as extended in space.³² We give credence to our sensible intuition because we cannot deny our intellectual intuition. Intellectually intuitable qualities pertain only to events in time and sensibly intuitable qualities pertain only to objects in space. Consequently, our idea of the supersensible world, which includes our wills, the moral law, and the moral world order, or God, precludes any sensible qualities, such as corporeality, substantiality, or causality; and our concept of the sensible world, which includes our bodies, the natural (or material) law, and the natural (or material) world order, precludes any supersensible qualities, such as spirituality or freedom.³³ God is supersensible: a spiritual activity; not sensible: a material thing.

in my outer body, or sense organ. Fichte calls these two determinable substrates, schema. See WLN, pp. 238, 243, 247, 268, and 273 (WLN [K], pp. 109–10, 113, 107, 129–30, and 132–33; WLN [H], pp. 100–101, 104, 116, 119–20, and 122).

²⁸ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 173–74 (GA, I, 6, p. 45).

²⁹ This is to say, when we act freely we are also immediately conscious that our thinking activity is limited in ways we cannot explain: we just have feelings that we did not freely produce. We call these limitations, “sensations,” and we think of them as arising from something radically different from our own thinking activity, that is from material things. This capacity to redescribe, or represent, our limitations as thoughts of things, Fichte attributes to our “faculty of imagination.” The faculty of imagination should not be understood as a productive, creative function—such as we mean when we refer to the artistic imagination—but rather as a reproductive, descriptive function of the mind.

³⁰ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 173–74 (GA, I, 6, p. 45). Compare WLN, pp. 304–305 (WLN [K], pp. 150–51; WLN [H], pp. 142–44). What we call sensible is a specific type of modification of our thinking that occurs without our willing its appearance in our minds. We are more strongly convicted of the reality of the supersensible realm of thinking and willing than we are of the sensible realm to which we attribute the limitations of our thoughts and wills.

³¹ This is to say, we do not infer or create either of these feelings, we just feel ourselves as thinking and willing and just feel ourselves as limited in our thinking and willing.

³² See WLN, pp. 192–94 (WLN [K], pp. 79–82; WLN [H], pp. 72–74). Intuition is immediate and non-discursive, but thinking is mediate and discursive; so the conceptualization of the content of intuition requires that it be extended or serialized through space or time as the case might be.

³³ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 174–75 (GA, I, 6, pp. 46–47). Fichte adds that Forberg is speaking of the concept of a substantial, or corporeal, God when he claims God’s existence is doubtful (“Development of the Concept of Religion,” p. 45 [SFA, p. 54]). If Forberg were

According to Fichte, comprehensibility and personality involve limitation, so God is not a comprehensible concept or a conscious, individual person. Comprehension occurs by relating specific concepts that are limited, or determined, in contrast to an unspecified, or determinable, multitude of other possible concepts. Every concept is necessarily finite. We cannot speak of the comprehensibility or the concept of God without implying the limitation or finitude of God.³⁴ Consequently, God is not a comprehensible concept.

The concept of a person involves the limitation, or determination, of a specific, conscious individual in contrast to an unspecified, or determinable, multitude of other possible conscious individuals, or persons.³⁵ Every person is necessarily finite. We cannot speak of the personality or consciousness of God without implying the limitation or finitude of God.³⁶ Consequently, God is not a person, consciousness, or individual. Since we cannot describe God in any terms other than those derived from our own finite consciousness, our concept of God must necessarily be an inadequate sign that points to but does not define God.³⁷

Fichte also admits that he denies proofs of God's existence in "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance."³⁸ According to Fichte, God's existence is not subject to proof, because religious belief is not a mediate cognition, which is obtained indirectly and contingently through logical inference, but rather an immediate cognition, which is obtained directly and certainly through intellectual intuition.³⁹ Inferring the existence of God as a creator from the supersensible world-order treats that world as mediate and contingent.⁴⁰ We cannot make this inference

strictly accurate he would claim that a substantial God is impossible and that a spiritual God is certain (*Juridical Defense*, pp. 174–76 [GA, I, 6, pp. 47–48]).

³⁴ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 177–79 (GA, I, 6, pp. 50–51). Fichte does sometimes speak of the concept of God, but he does not mean a determinate, limited concept of God but rather our idea of God, that is, what we must think when we attempt to think or speak about God.

³⁵ WLNM, pp. 349–51, 437, and 469–70 (WLNM [K], pp. 176–77, 220–21, and 241–42; WLNM [H], pp. 175–77, 240–41, and 263–64).

³⁶ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 178–79 (GA, I, 6, p. 51). Compare "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," p. 27 (GA, I, 5, p. 355). Fichte does sometimes refer to God as "He," but he does not mean that God is a determinate, limited person. We also personify nature by referring to it as "she."

³⁷ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 179–80 (GA, I, 6, p. 52). This, Fichte argues, is what Forberg is trying to say when he suggests that religion coincides equally well with monotheism, polytheism, anthropomorphism or spiritualism ("Development of the Concept of Religion," p. 37, [SFA, p. 38]). Strictly speaking, one cannot define God as one, many, man, or spirit, because all of these terms derive from aspects of our finite consciousness.

³⁸ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 179–80 (GA, I, 6, p. 52). See "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," pp. 21–22 and 26–27 (GA, I, 5, pp. 348–49 and 354) and "Concluding Remark by the Editor," pp. 278–82 (GA, I, 6, pp. 411–15).

³⁹ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 179–80 (GA, I, 6, pp. 52–53).

⁴⁰ *Juridical Defense*, p. 180 (GA, I, 6, p. 53).

insofar as our immediate cognition of the moral law conjoins belief in the moral world-order and our freedom. Every aspect of the supersensible world arises with equal certainty within this one intellectual intuition: No element is contingent on or mediated by another. According to Fichte, the existence of the sensible world is subject to proof, because material reality is a mediate cognition, which is obtained indirectly and contingently through logical inference. Inferring the existence of God as a creator from the sensible world order treats that world as immediate and certain.⁴¹ We cannot make this inference insofar as our sensible consciousness is mediated by our intellectual intuition of the moral law. We only attribute reality to the sensible world because it is a condition for fulfilling our duty. Consequently, there can be no proof of God's existence and any attempt to infer God's existence from the supersensible or the sensible world merely undermines the certainty of religious belief.

Even if atheism cannot be derived from Fichte's and Forberg's essays, and thus, even if Fichte and Niethammer were not negligent in publishing those essays in their journal, were the authors of the essays or the editors of the journal culpable in some other manner? Does transcendental idealism, and Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* in particular, somehow threaten religiosity, undermine morality, endanger society, mislead youth, or dishonor the University of Jena and its patrons?⁴² Fichte argues that his spiritualistic interpretation of religion nurtures the essential temperament of religiosity in general and reinforces the original tenets of Christianity in particular.⁴³ Likewise, his practical emphasis on dutiful action, sensible renunciation, and ethical responsibility coincides with obedience to both moral and civil law.⁴⁴ Moreover, his theoretical emphasis on scientific consistency and completeness establishes solidarity with the "friends of light"—forward-thinking scholars dedicated to pursuing truth through open rational inquiry (with whom the University of Jena and its patrons have already established an alliance)—in their struggle against the "obscurantists"—conservative pedants intent on perpetuating time-worn, received opinion through covert appeals to authority and sentiment (against whom the university and its patrons have already declared a quarrel).⁴⁵ Finally, only a robust philosophy such as the *Wissenschaftslehre* is capable of

⁴¹ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 180–81 (GA, I, 6, p. 54).

⁴² *Juridical Defense*, pp. 180–81 and 183–84 (GA, I, 6, pp. 54 and 57). Fichte had already addressed these issues (except for the last) at length in the appended *Appeal to the Public* (pp. 92–125 [GA, I, 5, pp. 415–53]).

⁴³ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 181–82 (GA, I, 6, p. 55) and *Appeal to the Public*, pp. 109–10 (GA, I, 5, pp. 435–46).

⁴⁴ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 182–83 (GA, I, 6, p. 56) and *Appeal to the Public*, pp. 107–17 (GA, I, 5, pp. 433–42).

⁴⁵ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 183–87 (GA, I, 6, pp. 57–60). One should remember that for Fichte, "science" means a consistent organized body of knowledge, which exhausts the object, or content, of its investigation by returning to its starting point, and which produces its organization, or form, by deriving from a certain foundation.

meeting the ingenuous demand for open, conscientious discussion of religion, morality, and ethics that characterizes the youths of Fichte's age.⁴⁶ Consequently, Fichte's philosophy, and transcendental idealism in general, must be regarded as safeguarding and perpetuating religious inclination, ethical behavior, enlightened thought, and youthful innocence.

If Fichte's and Forberg's essays were not atheistic, if Fichte and Niethammer did not publish anything that implied the least irreligion, and if Fichte's philosophy entailed no threat to human weal, who was the original source of the false accusation of atheism that led to the confiscation of the *Philosophisches Journal*?⁴⁷ That relatively obscure scholarly journal first attracted popular and bureaucratic notice after the appearance of the defamatory *A Father's Letter to His Student Son About Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism*.⁴⁸ Indeed, the various governmental rescripts of requisition and confiscation employed the same language, and cited the same passages from Fichte's and Forberg's essays, as the *Father's Letter*. Despite rumors that the anonymous author of this pamphlet was Johann Phillip Gabler, that esteemed theologian vehemently denied writing it.⁴⁹ Moreover, the *Father's Letter* lacked the intellectual erudition, stylistic elegance, and historical cognizance that one would expect from a serious scholar such as Gabler, displaying rather a penchant for popular opinions, shallow theories, and malicious pasquinades.⁵⁰ The philosophical ignorance and tonal flippancy expressed in this polemical leaflet indicated that it was not a legitimate work of philosophical criticism or even of earnest inquiry. Fichte claims that Christian Gottfried Gruner, a physician and

⁴⁶ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 180–82 (GA, I, 6, pp. 54–55).

⁴⁷ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 186–87 (GA, I, 6, p. 60).

⁴⁸ *A Father's Letter to his Student Son about Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism*, pp. 57–75 (GA, I, 6, pp. 121–138).

⁴⁹ Fichte documents these rumors and Gabler's response by appending: Johann Gottfried Dyck (1750–1813), *Ueber des Herrn Professor Fichte Appellation an das Publikum, Eine Anmerkung aus der deutschen Uebersetzung des ersten Bandes von Saint-Lamberts Tugendkunst besonders abgedruckt [On Herr Professor Fichte's Appeal to the Public, a Remark from the German Translation of the First Volume of Saint Lambert's Doctrine of Virtue]*, which was included as "Appendix D" (GA, I, 6, pp. 138–43); an excerpt from the anonymously written *Etwas zur Antwort auf das Schreiben eines Vaters an seinen studierenden Sohn über den Fichteschen und Forbergschen Atheismus: Nebst Andeutungen der Harmonie einiger religiösen Grundsätze Sokrates, Antonins, Jesus, Luthers, Kants, Fichtes und Forbergs [Something in Answer to A Father's Letter to his Student Son about Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism: Including Suggestions about the Harmony between the Religious Principles of Socrates, Anthonius, Jesus, Luther, Kant, Fichte, and Forberg]* (Jena and Leipzig: Gabler, 1799), which was included as "Appendix E" (GA, I, 6, p. 144); and an excerpt from Gabler's, "Nothgedrungene Protestation gegen ein falsches Gerücht" ["Obligatory Protest against a False Rumor"], which was included as "Appendix B" (GA, I, 6, pp. 119–20).

⁵⁰ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 187–91 (GA, I, 6, pp. 61–64).

erstwhile journalist in Jena, wrote the *Father's Letter*.⁵¹ Since Gruner had already achieved notoriety by slandering many other members of the Jena intelligentsia, Fichte suggests that the *Father's Letter* should be read in light of that unhappy misanthrope's prodigious discreditable lampoons.⁵²

If the original accusation of atheism was a sham, based on the frivolous scribbling of a disreputable malcontent, why was it given credence?⁵³ Why did purportedly enlightened governments believe the fraud? To be sure, the heads of those governments and their officials had neither expertise nor time to read the writings—whether academic or popular—of their subjects, so they relied on the judgment of their advisors, learned men enjoying both knowledge and leisure necessary to analyze the content of the writings published in their lands. However, why did these advisors—ostensibly astute scholars—accept the ruse, attributing the *Father's Letter* to the erudite Gabler and condemning the *Wissenschaftslehre* as a profane, harmful doctrine? Because, says Fichte: “*To them, I am a democrat, a Jacobin.*”⁵⁴ Whether motivated by literary jealousy, by personal malice, or simply by their own enigmatic prejudices and passions, some courtiers, academicians, and literati had manipulated others by nursing the common fear of revolution.⁵⁵

⁵¹ *Juridical Defense*, p. 191 (GA, I, 6, p. 65). Although Fichte does not mention Gruner (1744–1815) by name, the editors of GA identify Gruner as the subject of Fichte's description (GA, I, 6, p. 65n.). Fichte's former student, Karl Christian Krause (1781–1832) claims that Fichte paints a painfully accurate portrait of Gruner in *Der Briefwechsel K. C. F. Krauses [The Correspondence of K. C. F. Krause]* (Leipzig, 1903), pp. 12–13. Gruner denied authorship of the *Father's Letter* in the *Reichs-Anzeiger* of 8 May 1799 (Col. 1210).

⁵² *Juridical Defense*, pp. 191–94 (GA, I, 6, pp. 65–70). Gruner often wrote libelous articles for the *Neue Deutsche Bibliothek*. He also published his own yearly scandal-sheet, *Almanach für Aerzte und Nichtärzte [Almanach for Doctors and Not-Doctors]*, wherein he maligned his enemies and expressed his opinions about current events (medical and otherwise).

⁵³ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 193–94 (GA, I, 6, p. 70).

⁵⁴ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 195–96 (GA, I, 6, p. 72). In his youth, Fichte developed a reputation as a democrat and Jacobin because of impassioned political writings such as *Beitrag zur Berichtigung der Urtheile des Publikums über die französische Revolution*, 1793 [*A Contribution toward Correcting the Public's Judgment of the French Revolution, 1793*] (GA, I, 1, pp. 203–404). Fichte's youthful and mature political views were greatly distorted by some of his philosophical and literary rivals, most notably by various—usually anonymous—contributors to the journal *Eudämonia, oder Deutsches Volksglück*, a mouthpiece for political conservatism. Throughout Fichte's tenure in Jena, members of this political faction disseminated outrageous allegations about Fichte's participation in revolutionary, anti-monarchical, Illuminati, and irreligious activities. These rumors had sometimes led to Fichte being formally charged for illegalities. Although he had always been exonerated, he had reason to fear the intrigues of his many—often elusive and influential—enemies.

⁵⁵ The facts of jealousy and malice were relevant issues. Fichte had ascended from maligned peasant-spawned tutor to honored court-appointed professor nearly overnight. As

This fear—this selective mental derangement—led normally wise and just men to levy the ancient charge of “worshipping false Gods and corrupting the youth” in order to silence Fichte.⁵⁶

Is Fichte a Jacobin, a revolutionary, a democrat? His mature philosophy is theoretical proof that he rejects democratism in any doctrinal sense: As a philosopher, he has argued explicitly against the democratic form of government.⁵⁷ Moreover, he protests, his entire life is practical proof that he rejects democratism in any practicable or personal sense: As a citizen, he has only sought the external tranquility necessary to pursue his scholarship and teaching; as a scholar and teacher, he has eschewed direct activism, preferring to influence the minds and hearts of his fellow man through his philosophy, which he regards as a sacred, personal vocation.⁵⁸

Although everything Fichte says in the *Juridical Defense* is perfectly consistent and ingenuous, Fichte would have been tested to contrive an apology more perfectly confrontational and odious to the enlightened representatives of the intelligentsia, church, and state. By disallowing universal principles of common sense or reason that support religion, by rejecting arguments for God’s existence, and by denying basic tenets of natural religion and Christian orthodoxy, Fichte estranges the deists, neologists, *Popularphilosophen*, and ecclesiastical authorities.⁵⁹ In pitting the friends of light in Jena against the obscurantists in the rest of Saxony, in affirming the Ernestine Dukes’ trust in his scholarly and moral authority, in declaring himself accountable to none but conscience and mankind, Fichte angers Karl August, the other Ernestine Dukes, and their courtiers.⁶⁰ The original suspicion that Fichte was a Jacobin, and the original accusation that he was an atheist had long ceased to be relevant.⁶¹ It no longer mattered whether he supported or opposed democracy or whether he affirmed or denied religion. For most of the *Aufklärer*, Fichte’s appeal to individual reason, personal conscience, and supernatural revelation as

a special professor chosen by the Weimar Court, he gained privileges and protections not afforded to an ordinary professor. Although his brilliant intellect and ingenuous sincerity had won him the unprecedented esteem and trust of many students, his scathing tongue and fiery temperament had lost him the potential amity and respect of some colleagues. The fear of revolution was pertinent as well. The dukes and princes of Germany were not alone in dreading the possibility of civil war and political terror as witnessed during the revolution in France: By and large, the intelligentsia and burghers wanted some political change but not social unrest or political upheaval, and certainly not violent revolution.

⁵⁶ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 195–96 (GA, I, 6, pp. 72–73).

⁵⁷ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 196–97 (GA, I, 6, pp. 73–74). See FNR, pp. 139–41 (GA, I, 3, pp. 438–40).

⁵⁸ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 197–201 (GA, I, 6, pp. 75–79).

⁵⁹ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 165–67 and 173–80 (GA, I, 6, pp. 36–37, 45–51, and 52–53).

⁶⁰ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 165–68 and 182–87 (GA, I, 6, pp. 36–39 and 56–60).

⁶¹ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 195–201 (GA, I, 6, pp. 72–79).

final authorities was enough to mark him as an unsavory threat to their concept of enlightened human progress. Moreover, for Karl August and the Ernestine Dukes, this same appeal was more than enough to identify him as a dangerous enemy of their concept of enlightened despotism. Indeed, Fichte had already been too much for Karl August. Before the *Juridical Defense* had been given a thorough hearing, Karl August and his privy-councilors were gathering the appropriate rescripts to formalize Fichte's dismissal from the University of Jena. The "Gotha Rescript to the University of Jena" was one of many such documents they gathered in the final days of the atheism dispute.⁶²

⁶² Ernst II. Ludwig: "Gotha Rescript to the University of Jena," pp. 213–14 (FG, 6.1, pp. 381–82 and 384, No. 792a.).

Text: Juridical Defense

<GA, I, 6, p. 26>

Preface⁶³

I had the intention to say various things in this preface that I hoped would deflect incorrect appraisals of the following defense. Now that my relationship to the public has changed, or, to put it more precisely, has been destroyed, this goal means far less to me and is more difficult to accomplish.⁶⁴ I await the verdict of time and say nothing.

Indeed, this printing, which was begun with different expectations and nearly finished, would still be lying where it was if it had not been said publicly that someone from the other side was arranging to print this work and thereby to put it before the public anyhow, and that I would lose the expenses on the already completed edition. I have no reason to suffer such a loss, and therefore I am now publishing what would have been published already without me—for all to judge as they please.⁶⁵

Fichte

<29>

Magnifice Academiae Prorektor [Magnificent Academic Prorektor],⁶⁶

We, the editors of the *Philosophisches Journal*, and in one case the author of one of the accused essays, have divided our defense against the accusation of having either written or published atheistic essays so that I, the undersigned, defend the content of those essays and provide proof that they cannot be called “atheistic” in any respect; the second editor will explain with what care we act as editors.⁶⁷

⁶³ Fichte added the preface when the *Judicial Defense* was published.

⁶⁴ Fichte’s relationship to the public was “changed” or “destroyed” because on 29 March 1799—between the time the *Juridical Defense* had been submitted to Prorektor H. E. G. Paulus in March 1799 and the time it was published in May 1799—Fichte and his co-editor, Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer (1766–1848) received a formal reprimand from Karl August (1757–1828), Duke of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach, with a postscript “accepting” Fichte’s “resignation.”

⁶⁵ This rumor was circulated in several newspapers. For details, see the remarks by the editors of GA (GA, I, 6, p. 7).

⁶⁶ The editors of GA identify the Professor of Medicine Justus Christian Loder (1753–1832) as the prorektor of the Jena Academy. Anthony J. La Vopa and Erich Fuchs identify Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus (1761–1851) as the prorektor of the University of Jena. Although the *Juridical Report* is addressed to the prorektor, it was submitted directly to Duke Karl August and the other patrons of the University of Jena.

⁶⁷ Fichte and Friedrich Niethammer were the editors of the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten*. The accused essays were Fichte’s “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance” (pp. 21–29 [GA, I, 5, pp. 347–57]) and

We request permission for each of us to present his allotted portion of the defense separately.⁶⁸ The content holds good for both of us; each of us is responsible for his own statement.

Of course, it goes without saying—and it would be an offence against the most illustrious patrons of the University of Jena to suppose otherwise—it goes without saying that someone will notice our defense and expect a verdict to be passed, however much this verdict seems to stand in contradiction with the Elector of Saxony's letter of requisition, in which decided opinions are briefly and forcefully delivered about the outrage that has been committed and about the great responsibility for it, and which expresses no doubt and reveals no suspicion that we might yet be able to say something in our defense and in reply to the harsh decree with which the affair began.⁶⁹ According to that document, only a choice among severe punishments seems to depend on an investigation of the matter.⁷⁰ Fortunately, that we may trust in the authorities is confirmed by your governance, which is completely just and averse to every form of violence. We trust that you will not allow two defenseless individuals to be crushed by the weight of such a powerful accusation that has been issued under such a respectable and important name, <30> once you yourself, because of the demand for a defense, have opened the way for our reasons to reach your exalted personage.⁷¹ He who is already

Forberg's "Development of the Concept of Religion" (pp. 37–47 [SFA, pp. 37–58]). Fichte is the "undersigned" and Niethammer, the "second editor."

⁶⁸ Niethammer's "allotted portion" was *Friedrich I. Niethammers als Mitherausgebers des Philosophischen Journals Verantwortungsschrift* (GA, I, 6, pp. 121–43) wherein he does address the care whereby the editors treated their duties as censors.

⁶⁹ The "illustrious patrons of the University of Jena" are Ernst Friedrich (1724–1800), Duke of Saxony–Coburg–Saalfeld; Ernst II Ludwig (1745–1804), Duke of Saxony–Gotha–Altenburg; Georg I (1761–1803), Duke of Saxony–Meiningen; Karl August, Duke of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach. The "harsh decree" to which Fichte refers is the "Kurfürstl. Sächsisches Requisitions-schreiben an die Herzöge der Ernestischen Höfe vom 18 Dezembre 1798" ["Electoral Saxon Requisition Letter to the Dukes of the Ernestine Courts" of 18 December 1798] sent by Friedrich August III, Elector of Saxony (1750–1827) to the "Dukes of the Ernestine Courts" or the "illustrious patrons" listed above ("Acta Die Confiscirung und Censur, ingleichen die Leipziger und andere Zeitungen btr. Vol. XII 1798–1800, Loc. 55 n. 8 der Geheimen Canzley in K. S. Hauptstaats-Archiv," p. 59). Likewise, he means the "Saxon Requisition Letter to the Weimar Court," pp. 83–84 (FG, 2, pp. 25–6, Number 697).

⁷⁰ In "Saxon Requisition Letter to the Weimar Court," the Elector instructs the Duke of Weimar–Eisenach, Karl August, that the editors and authors are to be "called to account" and "punished severely" after an investigation is conducted (pp. 83–84 [FG, 2, p. 26, Number 967]). This instruction is followed by a threat—should the instruction be disregarded—that Friedrich August will be obliged to prevent Saxon subjects from attending the schools—especially the University of Jena—in Saxony–Weimar and Saxony–Eisenach (Ibid).

⁷¹ The "respectable and important name" refers to Friedrich August, the Elector, whereas "your exalted personage" is Karl August, the Duke of Weimar–Eisenach.

determined to allow foreign influence to rule would merely scoff at the poor person whose reasons he had promised to listen to.⁷²

* * *

In this affair there are two main questions with which the investigation must begin. The question of *fact*: did we really write or publish those essays? The question of *right*: did we do something wrong in writing or publishing them?

No one has found it necessary even to raise the first question, and it was indeed unnecessary. We do not wish to deny the following: *I, Professor Fichte, hereby declare that I, while in possession of my undisturbed mental and bodily powers, and in a deliberate and thoughtful manner, composed the first essay in the first issue of the Philosophisches Journal of 1798, which is entitled "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," and had it printed. And we the undersigned declare that we brought to press the second essay in that same issue of the Philosophisches Journal, which we edit, after we had carefully read it several times and corresponded with the author.*⁷³

Only the second question of *right* remains, and it is the *first* topic of our serious inquiry. This question is also divided into two subordinate ones. The first: *Is there no condition under which irreligious, even atheistic, writings that argue against the Christian religion, and even argue against natural religion, may be printed?*

⁷² Fichte's less than subtle allusion to "foreign influence" is his reminder to Karl August that the Elector Friedrich August and his Dresden Court have no juridical authority over educational or religious matters (or over the citizenry) in Weimar–Eisenach. If Karl August simply acquiesces to the Elector's demand, then he is surrendering authority over his own realm to a foreign prince. Moreover, Fichte means to imply that Karl August is far too wise and just a ruler to yield to this foreign prince or to accept the judgment of that prince's advisors (the High Consistory of Dresden) without giving the accused parties a fair hearing and that the "Weimar Rescript to the University of Jena" (p. 84 [FG, 6.1, p. 316, Number 702a.]), which calls the University of Jena to "question" Fichte and Niethammer "as to how they justify what they have done," represents an effort to give them such a hearing.

⁷³ Fichte describes to Reinhold his correspondence with Forberg prior to publishing "Development of the Concept of Religion" in the *Philosophisches Journal*, including his attempt to convince Forberg to withdraw the essay or, at least, to allow Fichte to add explanatory notes to it ("Fichte an Karl Leonhard Reinhold," ["Fichte to Karl Leonhard Reinhold"] of 22 April 1799, GA, III, p. 3, Number 440). Forberg would neither withdraw the essay or permit Fichte to add notes to it, so Fichte published Forberg's essay on grounds that exerting any more intrusive authority as editor—and hence, as editorial "censor"—by refusing to publish it went against his principles (Ibid.). The "first essay" is "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance" (pp. 21–29 [GA, I, 5, pp. 347–57]) and the "second essay" is "Development of the Concept of Religion" (pp. 37–47 [SFA, pp. 37–58]). "We the undersigned" refers to Fichte and Niethammer as co-editors of the journal and as authors of the two portions of the entire defense.

<31> The second: *Do the two accused essays really argue against any (true and rational) religion, and in particular are they to be called “atheistic”?*

If we emerge victorious from this investigation, then, *secondly*, it will not be pointless for us to eliminate our judges’ surprise at how we could have been accused so entirely without reason or any semblance of a reason.⁷⁴ We will do this *by indicating the true source of this accusation*.⁷⁵

If this source turns out to be contemptuous of all that we say, then, *thirdly*, it will be urgently necessary to show how it was nevertheless possible that *serious scholars, and even a wise government, could be misled into attaching such significance to that source so that they allowed themselves to be misled thereby into adopting such measures*.⁷⁶

I.

Therefore:

(1) Must all printed matter agree with the Christian religion (and religion in general), and is it simply (and under every condition) impermissible to write against it?

On the basis of which principles should we answer this question? On the basis of rational grounds and the constant, nearly unanimous opinion of all scholars, or in accordance with a positive law?

(a) If it is to be answered on the basis of rational grounds, then perhaps they *presuppose that what the sole true, immutable, perfect religion consists of, and thus also what runs counter to it, is settled*. And even given this assumption, how is the unlucky person who has fallen into error, and who takes himself to have reasons that oppose the truth of that established religion, ever to be helped if he is not allowed to recite his errors in public, in order to see whether or not there is one person among all mankind who can put an end to these errors? Do we wish to

⁷⁴ The High Consistory of Dresden brought a complaint about Forberg’s essay to the Elector of Saxony, Friedrich August on 29 October 1798. It was signed by the doctors of theology: Karl Christian Tittmann (1773–1861), the Dresden High Court Chaplain Franz Volkmar Reinhard (1753–1812), and Johann Christoff Rädler (1740–1801). The details of this complaint and the names of its signatories were not known in full by Fichte.

⁷⁵ By the “true source” of the accusation, Fichte means the true author of *A Father’s Letter to his Student Son about Fichte’s and Forberg’s Atheism* (pp. 57–75 [GA, I, 6, pp. 121–38]).

⁷⁶ Fichte means that if the true author of *A Father’s Letter to his Student Son about Fichte’s and Forberg’s Atheism* would deny the charge, it remains for Fichte to reveal what might have led “serious scholars,” including the well-educated members of the High Consistory of Dresden, and a “wise government,” especially the government of Friedrich August, Elector of Saxony, to base their judgments and actions on the transparently malicious accusations contained in an anonymously authored, and philosophically unsophisticated, pamphlet such as the *Father’s Letter*.

sacrifice his soul irretrievably, so that not one <32> of the weak will be shocked? *Avolent, quantum volent, paleae, levis fidei quocunque afflatu tentationum* [Let the chaff of fickle faith fly off as much as it will at every blast of temptation], says Tertullian.⁷⁷ “One gives offence here and there,” says Luther. “Necessity breaks iron and takes no offence. I should spare the weak conscience to the extent that I may do so without endangering my soul. Where I cannot do this, I should advise my soul that half, or even all, of the world will be offended.”⁷⁸

Does one, then, credit one’s sole true, immutable, perfect religion with so little inner strength that it cannot defend itself and must be protected by a power lying completely outside of itself if it is to stay alive?

But—*can the aforementioned assumption be made, after all?* Has the sole true religion been deposited somewhere, and if so, *where* is it? Would someone tell me so that I may go and find it? If someone responds, “It is to be found wherever God has *spoken*,” then that is all quite just, but only if we first agree on what He has actually *said*. The letter of requisition directed against us has no doubt been suggested by Evangelical-Lutheran ministers and endorsed by a Catholic ruler.⁷⁹ Both agree *that* God has spoken but are of very different opinions as to *what* He has said; we cannot write *for* the religion of one without writing *against* the religion of the other. So it is with all three of the privileged ecclesiastical factions in the Holy Roman Empire.⁸⁰ Therefore, what God—whether it is by means of writing or reason is a matter of complete indifference for the present inquiry—has

⁷⁷ Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus (160–220), *De praescriptione haereticorum*, III, 9. [Translation by Peter Holmes on p. 244 of Volume III, Tertullian, “The Prescription Against Heretics” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, 2nd Edition Revised by A. Cleveland Coke (New York: Charles Scribner, 1918).]

⁷⁸ Martin Luther (1483–1546), *Letter to Leonhard Koppen, explaining why young women can leave the convent without abandoning their service to God* (1523).

⁷⁹ On 15 December 1798, the “Kurfürstl. Sächsisches Requisitions-schreiben an die Herzöge der Ernestischen Höfe vom 18 Dezembre 1798” [“Electoral Saxon Requisition Letter to the Dukes of the Ernestine Courts” of 18 December 1798], which was sent by Friedrich August to the Ernestine Courts, was drawn up by the following officials of the government of Electoral Saxony: Friedrich Ludewig Wurm (1723–1800), George Wilhelm Graf von Hopffgarten (1740–1813), and Christoph Gottlob von Burgsdorff (1736–1807). For more details about the electoral rescript ordering the confiscation of the *Philosophisches Journal*, which was announced in Leipzig on 18 December 1798 and was published in the *National-Zeitung der Teutschen*, Issue 51, 20 December 1798, Coll. 1039–40, see the editorial note in GA, I, 6, p. 33. When Friedrich August I (1694–1733) converted to Catholicism in order to assume the throne as King of Poland, power over Lutheran (and Reformed, or Evangelical Christian) churches and schools was conferred to an exclusively Protestant Privy Council. Thus, although the Friedrich August III is Catholic, he rules a Protestant land under advice by Protestant ministers.

⁸⁰ The “three privileged ecclesiastical factions in the Holy Roman Empire” are the Lutheran, Catholic, and Reformed (Evangelical Christian) Churches.

actually said, what the pure truth consists of, has still to be ascertained; and as long as this has still to be ascertained, and as long as unanimity has yet to be reached, there cannot fail to be someone who says something that another person finds to be against religion—against *his* religion, of course. In his day *Jesus* preached against religion as well <33>—against the religion of his contemporaries, of course—and was crucified; and his opponents considered this quite just. Today, now that his religion holds sway among us, one considers this unjust. Without a doubt, *Luther* preached, shouted, and wrote quite forcefully against religion—as always, of course, against the religion of his contemporaries—but was not crucified, because the great ancestors of our most illustrious patrons protected him; and we Protestants consider this quite just, regardless of the fact that to this very day there may perhaps be individuals in the opposed faction who consider it quite unjust that he was not at the very least burned at the stake.⁸¹ In general, where in world history is there to be found a forceful person, one through whom mankind has arrived at its true vocation, who has not struggled against religion—against, of course, the religion of certain people, and, one can add, the religion of by far the largest portion of his contemporaries? Whatever may be alleged *about* religion is certainly at the same time *against* someone's religion; and the “against” simply cannot be eliminated without eradicating the “about.” Or should perhaps a distinction about people be made here, so that only the religion of certain people, i.e., the powerful, the favored, may not be written against, so that in the literal meaning of the word there are *privileged* religions, in comparison to which the religion of others, e.g., scholars and thinkers without political influence, would be *proscribed*—so that those who have a prominent position in the sensible world also demanded one in the spiritual world?

From time immemorial all scholars have also been of the opinion that anything, even what is most godless, most heretical, most atheistic, may be brought before the learned public, and indeed should be. I refer anyone who doubts this to Lessing's *Anti-Goeze*, in which the reasons for this are bathed in the brightest of lights and authorities from the most trustworthy church fathers and theologians are brought forward.⁸² Here I will quote only one authority, but one who decides the matter. Even *Goeze* himself was of the opinion that it must remain permissible to propose objections against religion in moderation. <34> “This may become necessary,” he says, “to keep the teachers busy.”⁸³ If one listens to *Goeze*, then one should think

⁸¹ The “great ancestors” of the “illustrious patrons,” or the protectors of *Luther*, were Friedrich III, the “Wise” (1463–1525) Elector of Saxony 1486–1525; Johann, the “Constant” (1468–1532) Elector of Saxony 1525–1532; Johann Friedrich, the “Magnanimous” (1503–1554) Elector of Saxony 1532–1547.

⁸² In *Anti-Goeze* (Braunschweig, 1778), Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781) defended freedom of religious expression against the conservative pastor Johann Melchior Goeze (1717–1786).

⁸³ *Goeze*, *Etwas Vorläufiges gegen des Herrn Hofraths Lessings mittelbare und unmittelbare feindselige Angriffe auf unsre allerheiligste Religion, und auf den einigen*

that only those teachers who are annoyed about being kept busy would wish for this permission to be canceled.

I cannot refrain from introducing an argument in our defense that occurs to me at this moment. *Lessing*—whose name every German scholar pronounces with reverence, and of whom the Electorate of Saxony, which produced him and gave him his initial education, can be especially proud, although later on, of course, it possessed him just as little as it possessed Leibniz, among others—published works that *really attacked the Christian religion*, as he himself did not deny in the least; and he was not severely punished for doing so.⁸⁴ As far as I know, legal proceedings were not brought against him even once for doing so. As far as I know, *Anti-Goeze*, in which he thoroughly proves his right to publish as he did, was not even confiscated in the Electorate of Saxony; at least when I was still studying in Leipzig, the book was openly for sale in the bookstores.⁸⁵ If the government of the Electorate of Saxony, acting in accordance with a rule, once confiscates harmful books because of their harmfulness, then it must confiscate *all* harmful books; and what it does not confiscate is to be regarded as something that it considers harmless and sanctions. If the government of the Electorate of Saxony once takes over supervising the orthodoxy of civil servants in the imperial estates, then to be consistent it must do so without exception; and it should just as readily have accused the Duke of Braunschweig's librarian before the Duke himself as it now accuses the Duke of Saxony's professors <35> before you, for the protection and influence of our most illustrious dukes is without a doubt no more or less significant than that of other German dukes.⁸⁶ The government of the

Lehrgrund derselben, die heilige Schrift (Hamburg, 1798), p. 79.

⁸⁴ The Electorate of Saxony can claim Lessing as a native son, because he was born in Kamenz in Electoral Saxony and began his studies at Meissen in Electoral Saxony, but it possesses his legacy no more than it does that of Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646–1716), who was born in Leipzig in Electoral Saxony. Lessing edited and published *Die Fragmente eines Ungenannten* (1774–1778), which contained writings by Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768) that criticized the Christian religion. This publication inspired the controversy with Johann Melchior Goeze.

⁸⁵ Fichte studied at the University of Leipzig from 1781 until 1784—when he was working as a tutor—and then returned to Leipzig in the winter of 1787–1788.

⁸⁶ The imperial estates were territories governed by the princes and dukes of the Holy Roman Empire or governed by a clerical “prince-bishop.” The rulers of the imperial estates only answered to the higher authority of the Holy Roman Emperor but not to “foreign” rulers of other territories, including the rulers of other imperial estates such as the Electorate of Saxony. Lessing was librarian at the Herzog-August-Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, the court seat of Karl I (1713–1780), Duke of Braunschweig. The Duke of Braunschweig–Wolfenbüttel ruled an imperial estate as did Karl August, Duke of Saxony–Weimar and Saxony–Eisenach. Consequently, if Electoral Saxony attempts to supervise the activities of the professors (that is, Fichte and Niethammer) serving the Duke of Weimar, it should previously have supervised the librarian (that is, Lessing) serving the Duke of Braunschweig. “Our illustrious dukes” refers to the “illustrious patrons of the University

Electorate of Saxony did not accuse Lessing; consequently, it is to be assumed that it was convinced by Lessing's reasons, but the protection that these reasons grant stretches far beyond us. He admitted to publishing writings against religion, but we by no means confess to this.

These matters may be what they will, and the government of the Electorate of Saxony may or may not have acknowledged Lessing's reasons; in any case we are sufficiently protected by his example. We, as scholars, were aware of this precedent, of course. If Lessing was allowed to do something major without reprisal from the Electorate of Saxony, then without a doubt we may do something minor without fearing reprisal from the Electorate of Saxony. We necessarily had to come to this conclusion, seeing that we could presuppose that a German is ruled by *laws*, not by blind caprice. No law spoke there. Whence, then, should a law now come? Ever since the case of the Lessing affair the Electorate of Saxony has not been able to take action against a civil servant in an imperial estate of a foreign territory for writings against religion and demand that he be punished—to do so against its own subjects is another matter, since they are subject to the law of the land—unless a law has been enacted beforehand throughout the German Empire to the effect that this court may exercise supervision over such offences and may determine what they are as well as the prescribed punishment for them, and unless this law is promulgated on its own authority to this civil servant in the imperial estate of a foreign territory.⁸⁷ Then everyone can comport himself in accordance with it; and whoever is held responsible and punished cannot say: "I did not know that; I could not have known this; I could not have taken it into account." We, however, justly say this.

(b) But perhaps another law was already in existence, for here we stand before the *courts* where only positive laws hold sway?⁸⁸ Even if what we have just now said about [this unlucky person's] right of bringing his deviant convictions of every sort before the learned public by means of the press (and even if those convictions really would abolish all religion) was completely incorrect; if, from the origin of a learned public in the bosom of the Christian church onwards until today, all the church fathers and theologians who thought just this had erred; if one clearly convinced us of this error, so that we could not produce another rational word

of Jena" mentioned earlier. Each of these "illustrious" dukes and patrons ruled an imperial estate and thus, in principle, did not submit to the Elector of Saxony as a higher authority.

⁸⁷ Just as Lessing, as a civil servant in Wolfenbüttel, which was governed by the Duke of Braunschweig, was not accountable to the Electorate of Saxony, because there was no imperial law submitting the resident private subjects of Braunschweig–Wolfenbüttel to the Electoral government, so Fichte and Niethammer, as civil servants in Jena, which is governed by the Duke of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach, cannot be held accountable to the Electorate of Saxony, because there is no imperial law submitting the resident subjects of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach to the Electoral government.

⁸⁸ Fichte is referring to "courts" of positive law (that is, laws of human creation) as opposed to "another law" (that is a law of logic, nature, or God).

in its defense <36>; well, then, to be sure, we would have made a mistake, but much would have been lacking for us to have fallen victim to a court on account of it.⁸⁹ No civil punishment rests on a deficiency of logic. Such a sentence could only be pronounced by means of a positive law that was in existence prior to the proceedings and was known to everyone. And even in case our writings really were irreligious and atheistic, where, then, is this law, on the basis of which we have been accused, and which stipulates the serious punishment that is supposed to be inflicted on us? In fact, which scholar versed in jurisprudence tells us which punishment accords with German law in the matter of writing and printing atheistic works?⁹⁰ We are aware that in the case of this accusation often lawless force has been employed whereby existing laws have been twisted and interpreted as they never ought to be. Is perhaps this lawless force what the letter of requisition from the Electorate of Saxony demands of the most illustrious patrons of this academy? Should we perhaps be judged *in accordance with common sense and natural law* (that of our accusers, of course)? Oh, one will recall which monstrous verdict in recent history was passed in accordance with common sense and natural law (that of the accusers, of course)!⁹¹ I think that German governments detest this deed. Do they wish to justify this very deed through their own application of the principle in accordance with which it was committed? *Discite justitiam moniti* ["Be warned and study justice"].⁹²

*It is indeed a law in every state not to permit anything that runs counter to religion to be published, but this law is obviously not a law for authors but rather for state governments themselves; it is not a civil law but rather a constitutional law.*⁹³ So, then, is what I wrote against religion or not? The author can remain quite calm with regard to this question, *because censorship has certainly been established*. The printing press is subject to the supervision of the state, and nothing at all can be published that is contrary to its will. It is the censor who has to decide that question entirely at its own discretion.

⁸⁹ In SW, V, p. 248, this sentence begins with "Wenn auch" rather than "Wenn durch."

⁹⁰ Fichte means to say that even if truly atheistic and irreligious writings violated the laws of logic, of nature, or of God, there is no civil juridical law that governs the affairs of private citizens or any imperial juridical law that governs the subjects of the Empire, which applies to or defines appropriate punishments for violations of the laws of common sense, nature, or God.

⁹¹ Fichte is indicating the trial and execution of Louis XVI, or Louis-Auguste, (1754–1793) of France by the National Convention.

⁹² Publius Vergilius Maro—Virgil—(70–19), *Aeneid*, VI, 620. [*The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Random House, 1983), p. 181.]

⁹³ Fichte means that the state laws censoring anti-religious publications are not *civil* laws that dictate the rights and obligations of individual citizens, as *subjects* of the state, but rather are *constitutional* laws that dictate the obligations of government officials and institutions, as *representatives* of the state.

This is clear. If the law trusted the author, then it would not subject him to censorship. It subjects him to it; consequently, it does not entrust that decision to him; consequently, it does not make him responsible for what is not entrusted to him. It is clear that the author who is subjected to censorship is <37> only responsible for not evading this censorship and is absolved if he has not evaded it. The censor is responsible for the content of his work. Thus, for example, not even one accusation should be raised against our contributor Mr. *Forberg*. He sent his essay to Jena to have it published. Censorship has been established in Jena, as he must certainly have known from his earlier residence here; and he is subject to it, as he must likewise certainly know.⁹⁴ But we possess freedom from censorship regarding our own writings and those we publish; therefore, we were his censors. *We* permitted his essay to be published, and *he* is quits with the law.

This is not the case with us. Everyone whom you deem worthy of a professorship at your flourishing, famous, well-attended, and respected university is thought by our most illustrious patrons to be a mature person who has outgrown the rod and is himself responsible for his writings as well as his actions.⁹⁵ You and your noble colleagues, in keeping with your wisdom and magnanimity, appear to say: “Things go well only when everyone works at what he understands. *We* have learned how to protect our realm and to multiply its people, to add to the prosperity of its states, and to administer the law and to dispense justice equally to everyone; and we put into practice what we have learned. *You* have devoted your energy and your lives to the investigation of the truth; we are willing to trust that you have learned what you need to know, and that you know as much about the topics belonging to your fields as anyone else does, just as you have trusted *us* to understand our business and to know our rights. Because of this confidence, and moved by the reputation of the spiritual freedom that flourishes among us, you, who are foreigners for the most part, have given your persons and your security in its entirety over to our protection. We are also willing to trust your will, as you trust ours; and we do so because our trust in you has never been disappointed.” And woe to whoever could disappoint the trust of these beautiful souls and darken the free spirit of your noble house, the spirit that you inherited from your great ancestors!⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Friedrich Karl Forberg taught philosophy at the University of Jena from 1792 until 1797 before becoming a Lyceum rector in Saalfeld. Insofar as he was familiar with the laws of censorship in Jena, he was justified in supposing that the censors would prevent the publication of his essay if they judged it to be anti-religious (a judgment the law did not permit him as an individual author and private citizen to make).

⁹⁵ As professors appointed to the University of Jena by Karl August (and answering directly to his court regarding the exercise of their official duties), Fichte and Friedrich Niethammer were free of censorship by state officials, or to put it differently, they were state officials entrusted to censor everything they wrote, edited, or published.

⁹⁶ “You and your noble colleagues” refers to Karl August and to the other Dukes of the imperial estates of Saxony, the “illustrious patrons” of the University of Jena, who

We maintain more dignity on account of this trust, but more responsibility falls to us as well, although for our part, given our mode of thought, we may prefer to endure the latter rather than to dispense with the former; indeed, it is only under this condition that we can value and love our situation. Consequently, [only when regarded] as *censors* of our own writings and of those we publish, not as *authors*, <38> could the most illustrious patrons of our university call us to account (and did call us to account); and because you have charged us (by bestowing a professorship) with exercising censorship over ourselves, you have declared that we require no supervision, that we ourselves must know best what can and should be discussed in our fields, and that from now on we should be responsible merely to our own conscience, the learned public, and humanity.

Our most illustrious patrons would never have deviated from their own principles on their own initiative. That issue of our journal has been freely sold and read in their lands for about half a year.⁹⁷ More has happened that modesty forbids us to mention here. We did not conceal that issue from anyone's eyes; no one called us to account; not even a single mild, friendly reprimand or admonition reached us. Now you have received a demand from a neighboring court, which values and observes entirely different principles regarding such a matter, and which treats its scholars quite differently.⁹⁸ In this demand there lies a rebuke—one that has indeed not been put into words, but one that is still quite discernible—of your own maxims of governance and your own religious principles, or, when regarded as mildly as possible, a rebuke of your lack of attention to highly serious matters that are happening under your eyes. Our most illustrious patrons will tacitly deny this rebuke. They will not allow themselves to miss this opportunity to demonstrate by means of a living example what thoughtfulness, what reflection, what—if it is permissible to omit nothing in a self-defense—steady profundity their trust produces. They have called us to account solely in order to give us the opportunity to let ourselves be heard regarding these matters. We recognize this wise, magnanimous intention; and we proceed, with quiet thanks and freest admiration, to our investigation of the second subordinate question (which is where our actual defense is to be found) as if we are embarking on a holy task, in which we must defend not only our own persons (which count for little on the whole) but also the principles (which are unspeakably important) in accordance with which lofty governments have established a refuge for freedom of thought (which until

cultivate and protect the “free spirit” of inquiry that they inherited from their ancestors, the defenders of Martin Luther.

⁹⁷ From October 1798 until March 1799, the first issue of the *Philosophisches Journal* of 1798 had been circulated throughout the various imperial estates apart from Electoral Saxony. (The editors of this volume have read *Ihren Ländern* [your lands] as *ihren Ländern* [their lands].)

⁹⁸ Fichte means Friedrich August's “Kurfürstl. Sächsisches Requisitions-schreiben an die Herzöge der Ernestischen Höfe vom 18 Dezembere 1798” [“Electoral Saxon Requisition Letter to the Dukes of the Ernestine Courts” of 18 December 1798].

recently was suppressed across well-nigh the entire surface of Europe), and have thereby rendered an everlasting service to the improvement of the human race.

<39> But we cannot do this without first removing, in a second preliminary discussion, an obstacle that could trouble us as we make a forceful and spirited defense.

The accusation against us has been endorsed by His Highness, the Elector of Saxony, in his own hand. Will we not be frightened by the princely name that every German is directed by his upbringing to admire? Furthermore, will we not be frightened by *this* name, which every honest German admires—voluntarily and from a heart-felt impulse—as the name of enthroned legality, fidelity, and integrity, and which, as I write this, recalls to mind the thoroughly modern and noble service that he has rendered to his land? Will we not be frightened by this name? Will not the weapons of our defense be wrested from our hands or blunted by this directed and heart-felt admiration, so that they will not strike an honored breast?

It would be very inappropriate if our admiration forced us to this. We have not been accused over some triviality. Plenty of unfortunate people have ended their lives in flames on account of the very accusation that is being lodged against us; and in spite of the mildness attributed to our age, I do not foresee what lesser punishment other than perpetual imprisonment or a most disgraceful banishment may be intended for *blasphemers*—the tone of this letter of requisition seems to justify speaking of blasphemers—insofar as we permit the slightest amount of guilt to be attributed to us, and insofar as people are willing to create the law against such guilt after the fact.

Oh, it is a hard lot that a prince, *this* prince, seems to come forward as our accuser—something that no prince should ever be! It would be a hard lot if what otherwise grants mercy to the criminal and reinstates honor to the dishonored, i.e., the personal intervention of a prince, should bind our hands during our defense. It would be hard to demand of someone that he, upon being told by a powerful person, “You have reviled God and are deserving of death,” should, purely out of respect and in order not to be argumentative, only reply as follows: “I must surely have reviled God, because you in your wisdom deem it so, and may whatever you in your goodness have decided for me come to pass.”

It would be inappropriate for our admiration to weaken the forcefulness of our defense, because we must defend not only ourselves but also the conduct of lofty German princes, as well as defend [what is] well-nigh the last refuge of free inquiry and [what provides] well-nigh the <40> final sanction for the human spirit to make further progress.

But must it then also (and can this admiration not) be connected with a most spirited and most resolute defense that makes use of all of its advantages?

There is the question—which, of course, cannot be answered without making special inquiries, which I cannot undertake in my current situation—of whether this matter has been handled in the privy council of the Electorate of Saxony as one that pertains to the evangelical church, about whose affairs a Protestant privy council or church committee makes decrees without the intervention of a Catholic

ruler, even at the highest judicial level, and simply presents its decision to the Elector for his signature, so that, consequently, the highest authority from which this accusation issued would not be the most illustrious person of the Elector himself, but rather some minister or some member of a church committee; a foreigner is not obliged to know or to be aware of whether their personal character lends to the accusation what is for us, in accordance with our mode of thought as well as that of the public, the most frightful importance.⁹⁹ There is the question—if the matter really has been handled in this fashion—of whether, given its *nature*, it should have been handled in such a fashion, since we are being punished not for deviating from a positive religious faction but rather for complete irreligiosity; or—if it has not been handled in this fashion—there is the question of whether it ought not to have been handled in this fashion, since religiosity, and especially the question of both freedom of thought and instructional freedom within a religious context, is intimately tied to the particular denomination that one confesses; consequently, there is the question of whether every step [towards answering] a question (which lies inextricably within our national constitution) pertaining to this matter must not have been neglected.

However, this question may be decided by those whom it concerns; it is extraneous to our defense, and we touch on it only in passing. Whether or not the accusation emanates from the person of the Electorate, it nonetheless emanates from someone who possesses official power, and we owe him our respect. But this official power, however it is described at the beginning of the letter of requisition, had then to be *proclaimed by someone*. We will stick to the <41> one who made the proclamation, and to those who reported the proclamation, until we finally come to the original source. This is something that we should not leave undone.

Generally speaking, sovereignty is only applicable to the administration of external power, but by no means to reasoning. There is just as little sovereign logic as there is sovereign grammar (as Caesar must have learned).¹⁰⁰ As long as some logical matter needs to be settled, sovereignty does not at all intercede, because by doing so it would endanger the *infallibility* that necessarily belongs to it. The advocates settle such a logical matter among themselves. They are completely equal to one another and do not have to defer to one another in the least. Only when they are finished does the verdict of sovereignty follow.

This is also how things stand in our affair. “If the accused have written atheistic essays and had them printed, then they should be punished.” The foreign *state* that writes to our government says this much, but only this much and nothing

⁹⁹ As the editors of GA (I, 6, p. 40n.) and the editors of *La Querelle de L'athéisme* (p. 89 n.) note, the text of Friedrich August's “Kurfürstl. Sächsisches Requisitions-schreiben an die Herzöge der Ernestischen Höfe vom 18 Dezembre 1798” [“Electoral Saxon Requisition Letter to the Dukes of the Ernestine Courts,” 18 December 1798] was prepared in advance by the government officials within Friedrich August's Privy Council and simply presented for him to sign.

¹⁰⁰ Gaius Julius Caesar (100–44 BC).

more; *as a state*, it can only say this much and nothing more.¹⁰¹ We could adduce quite a lot in opposition to this, but we are only private persons and reverently subject ourselves to the hallowed verdict. The *state* does not say **that** the accused propounded atheistic assertions. This the state cannot say; this proposition is the *result of a process of reasoning*. The state, however, never *reasons*; it *decrees*. Such a thing is said by some intellect who believes himself to be capable of reasoning and to whom we owe no respect except for that which he knows how to acquire by means of his reasons. We are also intellects who believe ourselves to be capable of reasoning and to that extent are mental powers who are completely equal to any mental power standing opposite us. Who can do it better remains to be seen and *in this way* alone will the superior power be determined in this case.

Consequently, when we respond to the second question of whether the essays by us that the censors allowed to be published are really atheistic, and when we refute the accusation *that* they are atheistic, we are not addressing ourselves to sovereign power.¹⁰² *We hereby most solemnly affirm to this sovereign power our greatest reverence; and we hereby explicitly and most solemnly declare: that herein we are not addressing ourselves to this sovereign power, nor do we believe that we need to address ourselves to it, nor do we wish to do so; that no rebuke that concerns our **opponent**—as we will from now <42> on refer to the **intellect** (abstracted from every particular person) that has **reflected** on what is in the letter of requisition from the Electorate of Saxony—that no rebuke that concerns our opponent, I say, touches on, can touch on, or should touch on the sanctity of the state; that we abhor, deny, and will always deny every interpretation of this kind. We hereby declare this to be so once and for all, and we request that this declaration be remembered everywhere subsequently, wherever it might seem necessary.* We herewith solemnly veil the holy head of majesty and turn our attention to the opposing intellect.

Therefore:

(2) Are the essays that we had printed really atheistic, as our opponent alleges?

(a) What does our opponent mean by atheism? He has forgotten explicitly to draw up a concept of atheism; however, from the context, from the type of

¹⁰¹ Indeed, the “foreign state,” the electoral government of Saxony, said a bit more (or less) than this in “Saxon Letter of Requisition to the Weimar Court,” namely that the editors and authors “be called to account and *severely punished* after an investigation has been conducted” (p. 83 [FG, 2, Number 697, p. 26]). The letter begins with the assertion that the essays by Fichte, “On the Basis of our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” and by Forberg, “Development of the Concept of Religion,” published by Fichte and Niethammer in the *Philosophisches Journal* conflicted with Christianity and natural religion and that they openly “disseminated atheism” (p. 83 [FG, 2, Number 697, p. 25]).

¹⁰² The “essays” were “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 21–29 (GA, I, 5, pp. 347–57) and “Development of the Concept of Religion,” pp. 37–47 (SFA, pp. 37–58).

accusation, and from the passages excerpted as proof of our atheism, we cannot possibly divine his concept of atheism; we may not dare to divine it for fear that we might do him an injustice. Thus, for example, the following passage from page 14 of my essay is excerpted in the appendix to the letter of requisition as partial proof of our atheism: "True atheism, genuine unbelief, and godlessness consist of quibbling about the consequences of one's actions, in not being willing to obey the voice of one's conscience until one believes oneself to have foreseen a good outcome, thereby elevating one's own counsel above God's counsel and making oneself into God. Whoever is willing to do evil so that good comes out of it is a godless person. In a moral world-governance nothing good can result from evil; and as certainly as you believe in a moral world-governance, it is impossible for you to think that good can result from evil. You may not lie, even if the world should crumble into ruins as a result. But this is only a figure of speech. If you were able to believe in earnest that it would crumble, then at the very least your being would be absolutely contradictory and self-annihilating. But you just do not believe this. Neither can you nor may you believe it. You know that certainly no reckoning is made for a lie in the plan of the world's preservation."¹⁰³

<43> Therefore, according to our opponent, a truly orthodox believer in God should express himself as follows: "Proper faith, true godliness consist of quibbling about the consequences of one's actions, in not being willing to obey the voice of one's conscience until one foresees a good outcome, thereby elevating one's own counsel above God's counsel and making oneself into God. Whoever is willing to do evil so that good comes out of it is the truly godly person. In a moral world-governance good results from evil (*moral* evil, as the context demonstrates, vice), and as certainly as you believe in a moral world-governance, it is absolutely necessary for you to think that good results from evil. You must always lie, even if the world should crumble into ruins as a result. But this is only a figure of speech. If you were able to believe in earnest that it would crumble, then at the very least your being would be absolutely contradictory and self-annihilating. But you just do not believe this. Neither can you nor may you believe it. You know that certainly no reckoning is made for true words in the plan of the world's preservation."

May we, should we take this to be the true opinion of our opponent? And if not, what should we make of the accusation, and how can we deal with it?

Our opponent may in fact be so at odds with us concerning the concept of atheism that precisely what he regards as the true religion, we regard as atheism and idolatrous doctrine, and that what he regards as atheism appears to us to be the one true religion. If, to him, our doctrine agrees neither with natural religion nor Christian religion, then, by way of contrast, to us, his doctrine is a distortion and debasement of the Christian religion. I have set out the reasons for this opinion

¹⁰³ "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance" pp. 25–26 (GA, I, 5, p. 354).

in the enclosed essay (Fichte's *Appeal to the Public Against, etc.*, Appendix A, especially pp. 51, 52, 72 ff.)¹⁰⁴

Which of the two of us, then, has the correct opinion of the other party, and who is the third party that may decide between us? We cannot be the judge of the other party, for we ourselves are the disputants.

Here I cannot go into the heart of the matter with my opponent, because he has not drawn up a concept of atheism; and we are just not able to figure out what he finds objectionable in our doctrine. But we hereby solemnly affirm that if some scholar who possesses reasons will present himself as a logical defender of the accusation against our doctrine, then we will quite certainly discuss the matter with him. For now we are able to do nothing other than <44> (B) to provide the external proof that atheism cannot be derived from our doctrine in a rational way.¹⁰⁵

We provide this proof by proceeding from some logical axioms, and we do so in the hope that our opponent will understand and agree to them.

First Logical Axiom

He who denies certain **determinations** of a thing (in a concept) does not thereby necessarily abolish **the thing** (the concept) itself.

To be sure, certain determinations in the concept of divinity are denied in those essays. There is no logic, however, from which it follows that divinity itself is thereby denied (and, consequently, that those essays are atheistic). It is merely the minor proposition of our syllogism that we have to debate. In those essays we deny the following:

(I) The *extension of God in space*, or His *corporeality*. I cannot demonstrate that *only* this has been denied (and for what reasons it must be denied) in some passages that have come to the attention of our opponent, without going a little into the core of the transcendental philosophy. I will take great pains to do so with the greatest clarity and strictest precision. But if nothing thereby becomes clear to the opposing intellect, because, say, he entirely lacks the requisite background knowledge, then at least the matter will become clearer to someone else. May he, the opponent, only be so fair as not to fashion new heresies for me from what he does not understand; instead, let him be satisfied that he does not understand and thereby acknowledge that he has taken notice of something that does not concern him, since he understands none of it.

¹⁰⁴ *Appeal to the Public*, pp. 106–107 and 112 ff. (GA, I, 5, pp. 432, 438 ff.).

¹⁰⁵ Fichte's demonstration will be an "external proof," because he must imagine how his opponent (who has not identified himself) might define atheism and defend himself from that imagined definition insofar as he and his opponent share no common definition of atheism wherein Fichte might offer an "internal proof." In brief, the "opponent" has not said what Fichte did, so Fichte can only argue as to what he did not do, hoping that he touches on the definition of atheism at issue.

I will draw up in individual propositions the established truths out of which our denial of God's corporeality issues. These propositions have been rigorously proven elsewhere by me, although up to now very few philosophers have known or acknowledged them.¹⁰⁶

(1) All of our thinking is *schematization*, i.e., constructing, limiting, and shaping a foundation that is presupposed in thought by our mind. (Schema.)¹⁰⁷

In geometry, for example, by tracing a triangle, a circle, <45> and the like, empty space is limited in a certain way; but this is universally known and conceded. This construction of the object, however, holds true a priori not only for geometry; it holds true for all our thinking, even for what we call experience. The difference is merely that in the first case we can *become conscious* of this *act* of construction immediately; in the second case, however, we can *infer* it only by means of transcendental philosophy.

(2) There are two such schemata: *Action* (pure, self-sufficient action that is simply a beginning and grounded solely in itself) and *extended matter*. (Time lies between the two and mediates between them, and the explanation thereof is irrelevant here.)

(3) The first schema is given to us through the command of duty, through the thought (which is simply not grounded in any other thought or being) that we should just *do* something. This thought and the schema given through it, i.e., acting, is the basis of our being; it is through this alone that we exist, and our true being consists only of it.

(4) The second schema arises for us *through apprehending the first schema by means of our faculty of sensible representation*; this faculty is called *imagination*. *What* we perceive is always the first schema. The instrument—the colored glass, as it were—through which alone we are able to perceive the first schema under certain conditions is the imagination; its form is altered in this colored glass, and it is transformed into the second schema.

(5) The first schema I call the *supersensible*; the second schema I call the *sensible*. The manner of becoming immediately conscious of the first schema I call *intellectual* intuition; the manner of becoming immediately conscious of the second schema I call *sensible* intuition.

(6) There is a region of consciousness in which the *sensible perspective* on the sole true matter of our consciousness as a whole, i.e., the supersensible, is accompanied by a feeling (sensuous feeling, impression) and simply forces itself upon us; in which region, consequently, that which is sensible appears (without the arguments or derivations of transcendental philosophy) as that which is first, original, and extant for us. This region is *outer experience* in its entirety. Those determinations in our thinking that we denote in language with <46> the predicate

¹⁰⁶ See WLN, pp. 173, 230–32, 295, and 418–19 (WLN [K], pp. 66–67, 106–107, 144–45, and 210–11; WLN [H], pp. 60–61, 96–98, 136–37, and 226–28).

¹⁰⁷ See WLN, pp. 238, 243, 247, 268, and 273 (WLN [K], pp. 109–10, 113, 107, 129–30, and 132–33; WLN [H], pp. 100–101, 104, 116, 119–20, and 122).

of *being* (persistence and subsistence) only belong to what lies in this region; the further determinations of this being, i.e., substantiality, causality, etc., only belong to what lies in this region. Only the object of experience *is*, and it *is* nothing outside of experience. (Of course, this *is*, simply employed as such, means something entirely different than the logical copula *is*. In philosophy we philosophers use this expression with this meaning; and it is not our fault if people have not learned our linguistic usage but still read and criticize our writings.)

The concept of *knowledge* belongs in this region; and this territory is called the *theoretical*.

(7) In addition to this sensualized perspective on the sole true primal matter of our consciousness as a whole, i.e., the supersensible, and united inextricably with it, there is yet another perspective thereon, the one given *through pure thinking as such*. This perspective provides immediate consciousness of our moral vocation. Whatever is given in this form, i.e., not given through a sense impression, is (in conformity with the laws of reason) not to be constructed in accordance with the second schema as matter in space; whoever constructs it in this fashion thinks irrationally. It is to be constructed as an action, i.e., in accordance with the first schema, and no possible sensible predicate—not that of being, substantiality, etc.—belongs to it. Whoever attributes such a predicate to it behaves irrationally. With respect to one portion of what lies in this sphere, one acknowledges that this observation is a general one. No one has yet imagined that virtue is a ball or a pyramid.

But the other portion of this sphere is what we call *God*. It is only in this sphere that the idea of the true God arises for us. If it arises in the sphere of sensible experience, then it is a product of superstition and immorality. Consequently, this idea is also to be described in accordance with the first schema; and God is to be thought as an *order of events*, but by no means as a *form of extension*. One cannot say of Him: “He is a *substance* or some thing,” for, according to our system (and its necessary linguistic usage), this is to say: “He is extended matter and can be seen, heard, felt, etc.”

Purely philosophically, one would have to speak of God as follows: He is (the logical copula) not a being but rather a *pure action* (the life and principle of a supersensible world-order), just as I, a finite intelligence, am not a being but rather <47> a pure action, i.e., action in conformity with duty, a *member* of that supersensible world-order.

It is this context of thought that explains the passage found on page 17 of my essay: *the concept of God as a separate substance is impossible and contradictory*.¹⁰⁸ In the language of our opponent this means the following: the concept of God as

¹⁰⁸ Page 17 is “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance” (pp. 27–28 [GA, I, 5, p. 355]); but Fichte seems to be referring to a passage on page 18, which is “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance” (pp. 27–28 [GA, I, 5, p. 356].

a *material thing* is impossible and contradictory. Would the opposing intellect like to assert the opposite?

This context explains the following passage from Forberg: “Does God exist? Answer: it is and remains uncertain, for this question is (I, who as the author must be the best interpreter of my words, understand them in this passage in this fashion and intend to have them understood here in this fashion) merely raised (in the domain of *theoretical* philosophy, and thus also with the meaning that the words necessarily have in this domain) out of speculative curiosity.”¹⁰⁹ Mr. Forberg is careful enough to fashion his linguistic usage in a way that is sufficient for the specialist. In the terminology of our opponent his words mean the following: Is God matter in space? But here, in my opinion, Forberg is philosophically mistaken and leans much too far in the direction of our opponent, seeing that he simply responds by saying that this is uncertain. Nonetheless, however, his skepticism is probably not atheistic, and it at least befits our opponent to accuse Mr. Forberg of almost asserting God’s corporeality, seeing that he accuses me *of this*, which I firmly deny. I wrote <48> the passage “It is a misunderstanding, etc.” (which is found on page 17 of my essay and is excerpted as proof of my atheism) solely with the intention of correcting Forberg’s assertion.¹¹⁰ (In fact, after page 2 my essay in general was devoted to providing this correction.)¹¹¹ This passage would *have stood as a note under the aforementioned passage from Forberg* (where, perhaps, our opponent would have been better able to notice its purpose) if I had stuck to my initial resolution and had not yielded to Forberg’s request not to furnish

¹⁰⁹ “Development of the Concept of Religion,” p. 45 (SFA, p. 54). Fichte dropped the italics, slightly changed the punctuation and wording, inserted the two parenthetical remarks and then, deleted the rest of the second sentence.

¹¹⁰ Fichte discusses Forberg’s skepticism and his attempt to correct it (GA, III, 3, p. 330). The passage to which Fichte refers reads in full: “It is therefore a misunderstanding to say that it is doubtful whether a God exists or not. It is not doubtful at all but rather the most certain thing that there is. Indeed, it is the ground of all other certainty, the single absolutely valid objective fact: that there is a moral world-order, that a determinate place in this order is assigned to every rational individual and his work is taken into account; that the destiny of each individual, insofar as it is not caused, so to speak, by his own conduct, is a result of this plan; that without this plan no hair falls from his head and within his sphere of activity no sparrow falls from a roof; that each truly good action succeeds and each truly evil one fails; and that for those who rightly love only the good, all things must conduce to the best. Moreover, it can just as scarcely remain doubtful, to one who reflects for only a moment and is willing to admit honestly to himself the result of this reflection, that the concept of God as a separate substance is impossible and contradictory; it is permissible to say this openly and to quash the babble of the schools, so that the true religion of joyous right action may arise” (“On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” p. 27 [GA, I, 5, pp. 355–56]).

¹¹¹ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” p. 21 (GA, I, 5, p. 347).

his essay with notes.¹¹² I had to correct Forberg's assertion in two respects. First, because the question "Does God exist?" can be posed in a sense other than that assumed by Forberg, and this is what my words "It is not doubtful at all, etc." are aiming at. Second, because the question must be answered negatively in the sense assumed by Forberg, and this is what my words "Moreover, it can just as scarcely remain doubtful, etc." are aiming at.¹¹³

The passage from Forberg that follows what is in the excerpt from Forberg above is to be regarded in precisely this fashion.¹¹⁴

That is how this passage from page 15 of my essay is to be understood: "There is no ground in reason from which one can proceed and, by means of an inference from that which is grounded to its ground, admit some separate being as the cause of that which is grounded."¹¹⁵ This inference from that which is grounded to its ground is made by the original understanding solely in the realm of sensible experience, in order to connect the phenomenon in flux to an enduring substrate, which is always corporeal. In this case that which is in flux, the pure action, is supposed to remain fixed; for this is itself what is immediate and is the only valid schema here, and whoever <49> makes that inference seeks and unavoidably receives an enduring, corporeal substrate in place of the pure action of divinity.

Is it, then, in all seriousness, the true opinion of the opposing intellect that the authors of the two accused essays have been mistaken in asserting what has been indicated above? If the opposing intellect is truly serious that these authors become atheists by denying the corporeality of God, then he must not only assert, among other things, that God is extended, but also (since, according to him, God's entire existence shall be abolished by abolishing *this* predicate) that only this type of existence, and absolutely no other, pertains to Him, and *that He is nothing but matter*. Shall I tell the opposing intellect in plain words into what he has transformed God? And is this, then, the orthodox belief about God that is in agreement with natural and Christian religion?

¹¹² When Fichte agreed to publish Forberg's essay in the *Philosophisches Journal*, he entreated Forberg to allow him to add explanatory notes, but Forberg refused. See GA, III, 3, p. 330.

¹¹³ "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," pp. 27–28 (GA, I, 5, p. 356).

¹¹⁴ The passage to which Fichte refers reads: "*Can everyone be expected to believe in God?* Answer: no. (For the question undoubtedly takes the concept of belief in a theoretical sense, for a particular way of taking something to be true, and this theoretical sense is also the only one that acknowledges common linguistic usage and that philosophers should perhaps not have abandoned.)" ("Development of the Concept of Religion," p. 45 [SFA, p. 54]).

¹¹⁵ "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," p. 26 (GA, I, 5, p. 354). Fichte has slightly altered the original sentence by changing *anzunehmen* [assume] to *anzuerkennen* [admit].

(8) Now, however, it becomes necessary, when that pure action is discussed on its own and certain predicates are to be attributed to it as a *logical subject*, I say, a *logical* subject (all of which, in my opinion, is more properly omitted, since it contributes nothing to our edification and can all too easily give rise to theoretical errors and superstition)—it then becomes necessary, I say, to assign (through the sensibility of our faculty of representation) even that pure action to something extended, indeed not in *space* but rather in *time*, i.e., to a *fixed time line*, in order to fix the *manifold* of action therein *in its unity* (which manifold has also arisen only through the sensibility of our faculty of representation). Language calls this which is extended solely through time, this fixed time line, a *spirit*. In this way the concept of our own *soul* arises for us as a spirit; in the same context of thought one says, “God is a spirit.”

Now, a spirit, in the sense of the word explained above, *is* not; it is not a *thing*, for only a thing *is*. A spirit is merely a *concept* that has arisen in the way just described. It is the last recourse of our weakness, which, once it has thought away all that actually exists, puts something into the empty position of the logical subject of which it is speaking (and of which it would not speak if it were more clever), something that should not actually be and yet should be.

The proposition “God is a spirit,” taken as a merely negative proposition, as the negation of corporeality, has its own proper, cogent meaning. To that extent I approve of it and set it over against my opponent, just as Jesus set it over against the Jews, who <50> likewise attribute to God a corporeal presence in the Temple in Jerusalem.¹¹⁶ In the accused essay it was beside the point for me to discuss this determination in the concept of divinity, seeing that, as I explicitly said in the introduction, I did not intend to exhaust the issue but rather only wanted to correct the essay (of which I was the publisher) in a few points. It is not beside the point here, seeing that I do not intend to leave our opponent in possession of any rational objection to use against us.

The same proposition, taken as a positive proposition, as a proposition that serves to determine the divine essence, is completely useless; for we know just as little regarding the essence of a spirit as we know regarding God’s essence.

(II) The *comprehensibility* of God is denied in those essays.

In elaboration of this point I must also try to expound on some of the core of my system, despite the danger of being misunderstood here as well.

(1) I said above that all of our thinking involves limitation, and precisely in this respect is it called *comprehension*; it is the grasping and joining together of something drawn out of a mass of *what is determinable*, so that there is always

¹¹⁶ Fichte is alluding to the biblical passage: “Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what; we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4: 19–24).

something that remains outside of the delineated boundary without being grasped within it, and thus that does not belong to what is comprehended. I invite everyone who reads this to put to the test whether or not he is able to comprehend something in any other fashion. Every reality that we grasp is only finite, and it becomes finite because we grasp it. Everything that is *something* for us is so only insofar as it is *not* something else; all positing is only possible through negation; this is why the word *determine* means nothing other than *limit*.

(2) Consequently, it is clear that as soon as one makes God into the object of a concept, He thereby ceases to be God, i.e., infinite, and becomes enclosed within limits.

This, then, is what personal observation teaches regarding all the concepts that have been made of God since time immemorial. That *extramundane* God, which, according to the opposing intellect, I should have perhaps been teaching, is surely *not* the world, since He exists outside of the world. Consequently, His concept is determined by negation, and He is not infinite, and consequently not God.

<51> What they say in response is well known to me. “The world is only a negation that, precisely for this reason, must be omitted from the concept of the most real of all beings.” Seriously, then, is the world a mere negation to them? Do they take it to be one in some other portion of their system, or do they do so only when embarrassed by this difficulty?

Now, then, should God—someone might ask this in passing, and I intend to answer this question in passing—should God be thought of as identical with the world? I answer: neither as identical with it nor as separate from it; He should not be thought together with it (the sensible world) at all; and He should not be thought at all, because this is impossible. How I think about the world will soon be seen.

(3) What I put forward in that essay about the impossibility of attributing *personality* and *consciousness* to God is grounded on this firm denial of God’s comprehensibility. One should not overlook the ground on the basis of which I denied this possibility. I speak (page 16) of *our own comprehensible consciousness*; I show that the concept thereof necessarily carries limits within itself, and consequently that this concept of consciousness cannot hold true of God.¹¹⁷

Only in this respect—only with respect to limits and the comprehensibility that is conditioned by them—have I denied God’s consciousness. As regards content—I try to express the incomprehensible as well as I can!—as regards content, divinity is nothing but consciousness; it is intelligence, pure intelligence, spiritual life and activity. But to grasp this intelligence in a concept and to describe it [both] as it knows itself and as it is known by others is just impossible.

It is on precisely this truth that this passage in Forberg’s essay (page 22) is grounded: “Religion can co-exist just as well with polytheism as with monotheism,

¹¹⁷ The passage to which Fichte refers is “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” p. 26 (GA, I, 5, p. 355).

just as well with anthropomorphism as with spiritualism.”¹¹⁸ If “religion” means the same here as “religiosity” (as the context indisputably shows), then I approve of the entire passage. To be sure, this passage is not, philosophically speaking, strictly correct: God is neither <52> one nor many, neither man nor spirit; all of these predicates are suitable only for finite beings, but not for what is incomprehensible and infinite. But if one attributes to God just one of these predicates, it does not matter which one it is; the error is the same in every case, namely, that one wishes to comprehend the incomprehensible. It is, however, a theoretical error that can co-exist quite well with orthodoxy of the heart.

In short: by comprehending something it ceases to be God; and every supposed concept of God is necessarily that of an idol. Whoever says: “You shall not form a concept of God” is otherwise saying “You shall not form idols.” His commandment means the same spiritually as the ancient Mosaic commandment means sensibly: “You shall make no image nor any likeness, etc., you shall not worship them, you shall not serve them.”¹¹⁹

And now—is it atheism, is it heterodoxy, is it a new, unusual assertion [to say] that God is incomprehensible? Does not the Bible say that God is a light that no one can approach, that no one has ever known, and the like?¹²⁰ Do not almost all of the catechisms use our own words to say that God is incomprehensible? Does not our opponent know this as well as we do, and does not he himself perhaps say so in other circumstances? But, of course, the words and behavior of the opposing faction are not often in contradiction; and while they say that God is incomprehensible, they set up a very precisely determined concept of Him and accuse everyone of atheism who is more consistent than they are.

Second Logical Axiom

Whoever denies certain proofs of a thing does not for this reason necessarily deny the thing itself.

We do indeed deny certain proofs of God’s existence.

But from this it does not follow that we deny God’s existence itself.

We give this account of the minor proposition of our syllogism.

(1) Proof in general involves showing the reason for accepting something. <53> Consequently, *mediated* cognitions require proof, and only *mediated* cognitions

¹¹⁸ “Development of the Concept of Religion,” p. 37 (SFA, p. 38).

¹¹⁹ This is a paraphrase of the biblical passage: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them...” (Exodus 20: 4–5).

¹²⁰ This is a paraphrase of the biblical passage: “Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see; to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen” (1 Timothy 6: 16).

are capable of proof. This is true only of what one accepts solely on account of another cognition, but by no means of immediate cognitions, which one knows by knowing anything in general and in the manner whereby one knows something simply of its own accord.

Belief in a supersensible world, according to our philosophy, belongs among the immediate truths; it is pre-eminently what is itself immediate. Consequently, it is *not at all* capable of proof, not at all capable of being mediated by other truths or proved on the basis of other truths. Belief does not thereby lose any of its certainty or reliability; it would acquire more if there could be different degrees of certainty. But it thereby receives dignity and value entirely its own.

Let those who wish to prove everything, as one should, in the proper, orderly fashion, i.e., through the connection of concepts, give me the proof that the object there which seems red really is red, that the object which tastes sweet really is sweet. I think that they will have to leave this undone, without on that account trusting any less in the pronouncements of their outer sense. The supersensible world, however, is given to the moral human being by means of inner sense, which he trusts even more than outer sense, because the latter only supplies appearances, whereas the former supplies the only possible “in itself.”

(2) In the proof of God’s existence an existence is supposed to be proved. But all inferences to existence are grounded on the connection of an enduring and stable thing to a contingent and transitory one. Now, either my opponent grants me the absolute postulate of a supersensible world-order as something immediate and merely demands of me that from this supersensible order I am to infer a self-sufficient creator thereof, as some friends of modern philosophy have done. But how could I do this, seeing that I truly by no means take that supersensible world-order to be contingent and transitory, by no means to require any explanation through something else, but to be what is absolutely most determined by itself? Or he does not grant me that postulate and consequently does not expect that inference from me; and I am quite convinced that the latter is the case. He may well expect a different inference from me: that from the existence of the sensible world to a rational creator thereof.

He must excuse me. I am incapable of making such an inference, because I just do not accept even that from which this inference proceeds, namely, the self-sufficient existence of a sensible world. I have explained this quite candidly in the accused essay. <54> Consequently, I do not have to make a causal inference to explain an existence that, according to me, does not exist at all. I have said enough for an intelligent person about the grounds of this assertion in section (I) of the first axiom. If it is not enough for our opponent, I cannot help him. If after such an admission he considers me disturbed, then he is free to do the following: if he thinks of a new label, he may call me an *acosmicist*, but he may not call me an *atheist*. What I deny is found somewhere quite different from where he thinks.

Now, if our opponent will not grant that I have vindicated myself of the accusation of atheism, he must also deny the second axiom that was drawn up

above; and it thereby becomes clear that he is not concerned about God's honor but rather solely about the honor of proofs that he is used to providing.

(C) So much for our refutation of the direct accusation of atheism. Still other accusations have been made: our principles, generally speaking, aim at the destruction of the religious mode of thought; they attack the Christian religion in particular; they are dangerous to the stability of the state.

Setting aside for the moment the truth or falsity of the assertions that have become a matter of dispute, is our opponent familiar with the spirit and the needs of our age? But what am I asking? I know that he is not, nor can he be, familiar with them. Only those who have the opportunity to experience the spiritual tendencies of those who will create the age are familiar with them. And in this case I can affirm, and ask him who can understand this to believe, that the most determined and freest spirit of inquiry is stirring in the thoughtful minds among our young people, without any external prompting from their teachers. Let those who would blame me for speaking out so freely, for not concealing or cloaking my language in a politically clever fashion, let them set foot in my academy just once when the conversation turns to this topic. I can say that in my school I would make short work of the deductions that one now reads as they are printed, that one reads in printed writings that are supposed to be very thorough; the dialectical pretence would become quite clear in the nearest academy. I, who had good reasons for disseminating my philosophizing <55> on theological matters last of all (I had submitted my first work long ago), I can say that it was only the lively interest of my auditors that drove me to turn my reflections towards this topic.¹²¹ I can say that it was only their principled objections to all the omissions and deviousness in the usual deductions that drove me to conclusions which will put their objections to rest. Those of my colleagues who deal with this topic in a rational manner and permit their auditors to raise objections will also have experienced how difficult it is these days to give satisfaction on this point. Our age simply no longer tolerates suppression of this topic of reflection by means of [appeals to] authority, shallowness, or purposefully palliative measures; the disorder (if free inquiry is a disorder) would thereby only become an annoyance; and a position that had to preserve itself through such means would only become more suspicious. There is nothing for it except thoroughness and openness.

As regards the content of the aforementioned accusations, I have demonstrated in the attached *Appeal to the Public* (Appendix A) in (I hope) an illuminating manner that it is precisely the principles of our accusers that obviously aim at the destruction of any sense of the supernatural, at the universal dissemination of a sensuous mode of thought, and at animal lasciviousness, coarseness, and licentiousness; and that nothing but our principles can re-establish the religious temperament (which has certainly fallen into decay) among human beings.¹²² I hope to have demonstrated that it is precisely our accusers who have debased

¹²¹ The "first work" to which Fichte refers is ACR.

¹²² *Appeal to the Public*, pp. 109–20 (GA, I, 5, pp. 435–46).

and degraded the sublime doctrine of Christianity and have deprived it of its true meaning, its proper character, and all of its power; and that it is only the principles of our philosophy that can bring the inner core of this doctrine into the light again. I hope to have demonstrated that it is precisely the principles of our accusers that, by empowering and sanctifying the sensuous temperament and by extirpating all feeling among men for something higher, simultaneously destroy the holy idea of right and subordination to a law and replace them with a blind caprice among all ranks [of society]. Among the powerful, they are replaced by brutality, stubbornness, an unteachable temperament, and the illusion that every office in the state conferred by them is a charitable gift of their personal generosity; among the subjects [of the powerful], they are replaced by baseness, deceitfulness, pretence, and the entire miserable mode of thought <56> of a slave without rights, all of which are combined with the urge to work one's way up to a place where one can oppress others just as one is oppressed now. All of this can only end in universal despair. Therefore, I hope to have demonstrated that it is precisely these principles that, by abolishing all conformity to law, do not [merely] abolish the stability of the state but rather abolish the possibility that a state may exist anywhere and divide the nation into a caste of masters and a mass of slaves.

Our doctrine, by means of the sublime idea of duty, makes sacred every human being's own affairs and teaches him to care for this without worrying about [the affairs of] others. It teaches him to renounce all pleasure; to despise the struggle for the presumed goods, enjoyments, and honors of other people; and thus assuredly turns him into a useful, peaceful, reliable citizen.¹²³

I showed in the attached work, even before I could foresee such an accusation, that we do not in the least think better of our opponent's doctrine than he does of ours.¹²⁴ I have drawn up the reasons for its reprehensibility—reasons that they must without a doubt leave unrefuted—while they have yet to provide one puny semblance of a reason in opposition to us. They have only *said* and *asserted* that we are incorrect and they are correct. Their current advantage is thus only founded on the fact that they have the good fortune of *making a proclamation* on behalf of an external power and we are simply *defending* ourselves. How would things stand if our roles were reversed and we for our part were able to *make a proclamation* on behalf of an existing executive power? If our way of thinking were not at the same time as contrary to our opponent's way of thinking as our doctrine is to theirs, and if it could occur to us to employ some other means for defending the truth besides that of patient instruction, then we would have to have *their* writings confiscated (*with* reason, just as they [confiscate ours] *without* reason) for being atheistic, idolatrous, blasphemous, corrupting, and fundamentally pernicious; then in letters of requisition we would have to insist (*with* reason, just as they [did] *without* reason) on the “severe punishment of their outrageous deed” (and we could almost use their own letters word for word).

¹²³ *Appeal to the Public*, pp. 117–18 (GA, I, 5, p. 444).

¹²⁴ *Appeal to the Public*, pp. 107–17 (GA, I, 5, pp. 433–42).

In short, given what has been said, the true fault of our doctrine is that it is the doctrine of the weaker faction (as it appears to them, for they are not thinking of spiritual strength at all, only of fists), i.e., that it is not supported by armed might. According to the same argument, the Protestant doctrine (our persecutors regard themselves as members of this faction) was false in former times; <57> it has become true since then because it has learned to turn this argument to its advantage. So, do people intend to repeat these extravagances of human reason all the time, and will the human race not become smarter even once by means of experience?

Only a single new fear, which was not raised in the *Appeal to the Public* and is irrelevant to its purposes, has been uttered on the occasion of this accusation, and here I will briefly take it into consideration. That is, it is feared that our statements do a disservice to the honor and good name of our dear University of Jena. I will investigate the reasons for this fear.

From time immemorial there has been and, as long as there are human beings, there will continually be two great factions: those who hold fast to what is time-honored and do not tolerate the least disturbance therein, who indeed attempt to turn back the clock; and those who go forward and strive to perfect mankind's knowledge as well as its affairs. The former are nowadays called *obscurantists*; and for the sake of brevity I will make use of that name here, especially since this faction as it appears here surely cannot object to this name, which is unfair in many other circumstances but not in the present one.¹²⁵ The latter may be called *friends of light*.¹²⁶ The war between these factions is eternal, just as they are themselves; however, there are epochs in which this war flares up with greater intensity. Then it seems that the love of many useful things is bound up with a love of obscurity, which, if it is pure, is not imbued with the greatest courage. For example, the time of the Reformation was one of these epochs; and the present day, which in general bears a great resemblance to that time, is likewise one of these epochs. The present-day policy maker, in my opinion, would benefit if when dealing with delicate cases he were to abstract rules of conduct from the history of that time; and if this had been done sooner, more frequently, and more widely, then, it seems to me, certain delicate cases would not have arisen at all.

Since both of the aforementioned factions are of entirely opposed modes of thought, they necessarily contradict each other with regard to their concepts of

¹²⁵ Fichte seems to use "obscurantists" to indicate not merely enemies of enlightenment but also the representatives of a more general attitude of animosity toward the public dissemination of knowledge and particularly, the presumption that popular discussion of social, moral, and religious issues leads to anarchy and depravity within the populace.

¹²⁶ Fichte seems to use "friends of light" to indicate not merely proponents of enlightenment but also the representatives of a more general attitude of good will toward the public dissemination of knowledge and particularly, the presumption that popular discussion of social, moral, and religious issues leads to mutual cooperation and respect within the populace.

honor. What signifies for one faction a good reputation and renown is to the other a very bad reputation and shame; and vice versa. So it is, and so it must remain, for it is necessarily so.

The worst policy that someone could seize on—at any time, but more especially in an epoch in which the war has broken out more violently—would be one <58> of steering a middle course in order to please both factions and to gain their respect. This certainly spoils things with both of them. One is reproached by both of them, praised by neither of them, and acquires the very worst reputation. Any reconciliation, any rapprochement of the two factions, as a consequence of dialogue (not perhaps as a consequence of time) is impossible; and he who expects it is an inexperienced child. You good-natured friend of light, just try to demonstrate to the obscurantist his mistake, which seems to you to be so easy to demonstrate. Perhaps he will grant you your entire demonstration; however, your mistake is already found in, and consists precisely of, the fact *that you demonstrate and reason*. In fact, you are arguing with weapons that are forbidden. You should *believe and obey*. Do you not know, then, that reason itself, on which you depend, is corrupted and contaminated, and that (as you have made use of the natural light) you must receive the supernatural rule from their hands? (For example, I know quite well that this defense of mine will accomplish nothing with my actual accuser. When he finishes reading it—if he actually does so—he will say: “Fichte should not reason; he should yield.” I do not write this defense for him but rather to show those who can protect me from his aggressive behavior that I am worthy of such protection.)

The only way to come through safely, and to be honored by and maintain a good reputation with one side, is as follows: one decisively declares oneself for one of the two factions and stands by it steadfastly and unwaveringly.

Now, if choosing this faction were simply and solely a matter of honor and good reputation, and if acquiring the most extensive and especially the most enduring renown formed one’s sole purpose, then it is indisputable that one would have to join the friends of light.

This side possesses the most extensive good reputation. I do not intend to assert that, numerically speaking, there are more friends of light than obscurantists; however, the former are of greater importance. As a rule, this side possesses talent, eloquence, and proper and thorough knowledge. As a rule, the other side is unhelpful in word and deed, verbose, trivial, ignorant, and lacks useful knowledge. The former is able to articulate what it thinks and to make a name for itself; the latter, for the most part, possesses no power of expression and can only inwardly swear and fret in cases where it does not even perceive an opportunity for furtively arranging a writ of confiscation or a letter of requisition, the intended success of which nonetheless remains very doubtful.

<59> This side possesses a good reputation that will last eternally. The obscurantists have the friends of light of their time, and of all subsequent ages, against them. Their shame never dies and will only increase as time goes on. Who now regards *Joachim Lange* as anything but an intolerant persecutor; and who,

even in the next generation, will regard *Goeze* as anything else?¹²⁷ Furthermore, the obscurantists even have the obscurantists of future ages against them. They commonly outlive the good reputation that they have with their own faction and certainly lose it, even among their own faction, after their death. The obscurantists of every future generation call those of the previous generation by their true name, for even they are carried forward by the progress of time. There is certainly not a single obscurantist who does not reject this name and who does not regard himself as enlightened. According to them, enlightenment is a good thing, but their opponents take it too far. But how is it possible that these people regard themselves as enlightened? Only because they are more distinguished than other people; for them, these other people are the obscurantists. By way of contrast, the merit and renown connected with raising the human race to a higher level in some particular age lasts for all time, even if posterity once again makes great forward progress. Without a doubt, the University of *Wittenberg*, when *Luther* and *Melanchthon* taught there, had a very evil reputation with the popes and their followers as well as with the Albertine Duke *Georg*.¹²⁸ For this reason, it had a good reputation with the intelligent and enlightened men of that time, and its renown still lives with us and will survive from century to century. This was seen, without a doubt, by the Ernestine Elector Friedrich the Wise, who had already thereby earned his epithet and gained undying renown.¹²⁹ He was strong enough to scorn that evil reputation and left behind an example of true honor for his most illustrious great-grandchildren.¹³⁰

Our good University of Jena is renowned among the friends of light. It acquired this good name and, it seems to me, will not have to do anything but keep working in order that it does not lag behind its renown. Certain other universities, which seem to want to take us into their care, content themselves with their renown among the opposing faction. This faction could be completely satisfied with them if only it were a little <60> reasonable. Our good university can now pursue no other path

¹²⁷ Joachim Lange (1676–1727) was a Pietist theologian at the University of Halle. He was an outspoken critic of enlightenment generally and of Christian Wolff particularly.

¹²⁸ Phillip Melanchthon (1497–1560) was a leader of the Reformation. He taught philosophy and theology at the University of Wittenburg. George, “the Bearded” Duke of Saxony, (1471–1539) was a staunch supporter of the Catholic Church. He was the son of Albert III, “the Bold” Duke of Saxony (1443–1500), the founder of the Albertine line of the Wettin family of Saxon princes.

¹²⁹ Friedrich III, “the Wise” Elector of Saxony, (1463–1525) was a defender of the Reformation. He was the son of Ernst, Elector of Saxony, the founder of the Ernestine line of the Wettin family of Saxon princes. Perhaps “already thereby” [*schon dadurch*] is Fichte’s allusion to the fact that Friedrich had already shown his wisdom by founding the University of Wittenburg in 1502 before Luther arrived and fell under his protection in 1508.

¹³⁰ Friedrich III had no legitimate great-grandchildren as he died unmarried and was succeeded by his brother Duke Johann, “the Constant” (1468–1532).

at all to renown than the one it has heretofore taken, even if its instructors or its most illustrious patrons could wish it to take another one. Its actual crime consists precisely in its good reputation; and even now this may constitute a considerable portion of the guilt of the defendants. There is only one condition under which the opposing faction could make peace with our university, namely, that it sink into the same obscurity and be swallowed up by the same evil reputation with which certain other universities are covered and (which, given its situation, must follow from the preceding) be completely destroyed. The measures that they have suggested are the certain way to reach this end.¹³¹

II.

If one has read my defense up to this point, and if one has read through the attached “Appeal to the Public,” and finds that, given how I present the affair, the accusation of atheism is so thoroughly without any foundation that our doctrine is actually highly religious, then one must wonder how it was at all possible to raise the accusation on the basis of nothing. One must have thought, or the suspicion must arise, that I shifted the true point of view by various artificial means and substituted entirely different material of another sort. I have not provided a thorough response if I, historically speaking, do not seek out the actual source of this accusation and do not make known the true character of this source; on the contrary, if I do so, then I triumph and my opponent is left completely ashamed. I am obliged to do so, as is my co-defendant.

Some months ago there appeared a work that I am including among the documents (Appendix C): *A Father’s Letter to His Son About Fichte’s and Forberg’s Atheism*.¹³² This work displays the most fervent *animosity* towards the person of the author of the first essay.¹³³ It does this through its *motto*.¹³⁴ It does this through the twice-repeated slander (which is not even a product of the letter writer’s own wit but rather that of the bookseller Friedrich Nicolai) <61> that I took myself to

¹³¹ These suggested “measures” would presumably be to warn the faculty at Jena to avoid expressing anything in their lectures likely to be construed as going against Christianity or natural religion. See “Saxon Letter of Requisition to the Weimar Court,” pp. 83–84 (FG 2, Number 697, p. 26).

¹³² *A Father’s Letter to his Student Son about Fichte’s and Forberg’s Atheism*, pp. 57–75 (GA, I, 6, pp. 121–138). Fichte dropped “Student” from the title of the *Father’s Letter*, which he included as “Appendix C.”

¹³³ It displays animosity toward Fichte, who was the author of the “first essay.”

¹³⁴ The motto: “Because they took themselves to be wise, they became fools” (Romans 1: 22). See *A Father’s Letter to his Student Son about Fichte’s and Forberg’s Atheism*, p. 57 (GA, I, 6, p. 121).

be the custodian of the human race.¹³⁵ It does this through the distortion advanced on page 5 and the detestable accusation grounded thereupon.¹³⁶ (It is, I say, a *distortion*, for I never said that I *intended* to annihilate the estimable man alluded to there, or that in the future—which in students' slang could mean at any time—I intended to deprive him of his academic acclaim; but rather I did it immediately and declared that I did it immediately; that is, I have judged that this man is no genuinely original speculative mind; in the absence of such a mind, however, one can still have other indisputable merits and excellent accomplishments and can impart great advantages to studious youth, none of which I have ever wished to deny to this deserving man.¹³⁷ It displays its animosity through a number of other slanders and insults, which, however, I am unable to single out here any further, but which anyone who can bring himself to read through its pages will indisputably notice. Just for this reason the testimony of this author had to count for nothing.

Furthermore, this work displays the most conspicuous *ignorance*: about the very *essence* of speculation, given that it attempts, by drawing on the *history* of philosophy, to teach me (page 14) how I should have *reasoned*; about the *most recent history* of philosophy, given that the author simply cannot sufficiently marvel at some of my remarks about the absolute being of the world (understood

¹³⁵ Friedrich Christoph Nicolai (1733–1811) considered Fichte an egotistical philosophical *Schwärmer*. See *Leben und Meinungen Sempronius Gundiberts eines deutschen Philosophen* [*Life and Opinions of Sempronius Gundibert A German Philosopher*] (Berlin and Stettin, 1798), p. 5. See also *Ueber meine gelehrte Bildung, über meine kenntniss der kritischen Philosophie und meine Schriften diesselbe betreffend, und über die Herren Kant, J. B. Erhard, und Fichte* (Berlin, 1798). Fichte is referred to as the “custodian of the human race” in *A Father's Letter to his Student Son about Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism*, pp. 60–61 and 65–67 (GA, I, 6, pp. 124 and 129).

¹³⁶ *A Father's Letter to his Student Son about Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism*, pp. 57–58 (GA, I, 6, p. 122). The editors of GA suggest that this passage was actually on p. 2 rather than p. 5 of the original.

¹³⁷ The Father states: “But Messrs. *Fichte* and *Forberg* publicly state that they do not believe in God and declare belief in a divinity in the usual sense to be nonsense. Mr. Fichte states right at the beginning of his essay that he has heretofore expounded on these principles in the lecture hall but now considers it his duty to lay them before the greater philosophical public for examination and mutual deliberation. That the coarsest atheism is being openly taught at a Christian university is certainly unheard of. And yet Fichte enjoys so much approval, it is said, that he has succeeded in *annihilating* one of his colleagues (whom he considered his rival), as he had publicly threatened to do (in accordance with the principle of pure morality)” pp. 57–58 (GA, I, 6, pp. 121–22).

The Father was referring to Christian Erhard Schmid (1761–1812), a Kantian in Jena, who Fichte had declared to be “*nonexistent as a philosopher*.” See “A Comparison of Prof. Schmid's System and the *Wissenschaftslehre* [Excerpt]” in EPW, p. 335 (GA I, 3, pp. 255–71). The “detestable accusation” is that Fichte was expounding atheism at the lectern and the “distortion” that Fichte claimed to have annihilated Schmid literally “according to the principle of pure morality” rather than “as a philosopher.”

from the point of view of the philosophy of nature) and about an order without a creator thereof and the like.¹³⁸ Yet for anyone who has cast only a few glances at the commonly known critical philosophy these propositions are familiar enough.¹³⁹ It displays the most conspicuous *ignorance* about the *most recent history* of philosophy, given that the author equates the assertion that the world exists through itself with the assertion that a palace <62> built itself—a parallel that may deceive an immature person but does not belong in a work written in opposition to a critical philosopher who makes (as is well-known) a crucial and essential distinction between the products of nature and the products of artifice.¹⁴⁰

It displays the most pitiable lack of understanding, shallowness, and lack of deliberation. [This is so] because this writer, when he should proceed to his refutation, complains that he does not understand the author, that it is not worth the effort to rack one's brains with the author's philosophizing, that he (as his son Ferdinand will testify) does not have time, and the like.¹⁴¹ [This is so] because he, when considering the important objection that nothing comes from nothing, refers Ferdinand to a reply that Ferdinand had already given in school, but which we, unfortunately, are not told, although it would be of the highest importance, since no philosopher has yet discovered such a reply and the entire shape of philosophy would be altered by it.¹⁴² [This is so] because he refutes (on page 24) (as the author said) "so that the true religion of joyous right action may arise" with (as this writer adds) "perhaps he meant to say: so that the door to every vice may be opened."¹⁴³ [This is so] because he seems to regard the distortions and scurrilous absurdities of *Sempronius Gundibert* as genuinely significant and bids the spread among real

¹³⁸ The Father says: "Mr. Fichte must not have gotten very far into philosophical history: otherwise, he would have taken *Berkeley's idealism* into consideration" (*Father's Letter*, pp. 57–62 [GA, I, 6, p. 125]). Likewise, the Father refers to various "sophistries of the new philosophy" that even the skeptic David Hume was "humble" enough to recognize as "mere cavils and sophisms" (*The Father's Letter*, pp. 57–63 [GA, I, 6, pp. 122–24]). Moreover, he complains that Fichte's arguments for why one cannot demonstrate the existence of a creator of the sensible world or of the moral world order are "confused" (pp. 58–63 [GA, I, 6, pp. 122–126]).

¹³⁹ The Father is obviously unfamiliar with even Kant's critical philosophy since, for example, he does not understand that philosophy cannot go outside the limits of experience by asking about the creator of the natural world-order or by asking about the creator of the moral world-order.

¹⁴⁰ *A Father's Letter to his Student Son about Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism*, pp. 58–60 (GA, I, 6, p. 123).

¹⁴¹ *A Father's Letter to his Student Son about Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism*, pp. 62–63 (GA, I, 6, p. 126). Ferdinand is the fictitious son addressed in the letter.

¹⁴² *A Father's Letter to his Student Son about Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism*, pp. 61–62 (GA, I, 6, p. 125).

¹⁴³ *A Father's Letter to his Student Son about Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism*, pp. 65–67 (GA, I, 6, p. 129).

students of a book that can be tolerable to only the most vulgar rabble of the reading public.¹⁴⁴

On its surface it even bears the imprint of a scribbling hack: it is written in an <63> indefinite (e.g., he writes “philosophical history” instead of “history of philosophy”), insipid, dull, verbose language.¹⁴⁵

It is a production that shuns the light; neither its author nor even its publisher have dared to acknowledge it by name.¹⁴⁶

Scholars in Leipzig have actually thought or merely pretended—I know not which; I am allowed this alternative, since for scholars the former is almost even more injurious than the latter—that a publication in such condition is the work of Dr. Gabler, the famous and estimable theologian of Altdorf.¹⁴⁷ “This publication,” says Dr. Gabler in his printed declaration (Appendix B), to which I will immediately make further reference, “has with effort been brought into circulation in the Electorate of Saxony.” “At the same time a rumor has been carefully spread that I (Dr. Gabler) am the author of this publication.”¹⁴⁸ In a pamphlet (which has been censored here in Jena and is just now being printed) entitled *Apologetic Essay, etc.* it is said that copies of that letter have been distributed in Leipzig free of charge, always with the assurance that Dr. Gabler is its author and that they were being handed out on his orders.¹⁴⁹ Many who doubted this news about the author were promised that they would be shown letters in Dr. Gabler’s own handwriting <64> that would prove his authorship; *I* can prove this latter claim by means of letters. The same publication was dispatched to Dresden, no doubt also with the

¹⁴⁴ *A Father’s Letter to his Student Son about Fichte’s and Forberg’s Atheism*, pp. 57–58 (GA, I, 6, p. 122). Nicolai’s *Leben und Meinungen des Sempronius Gundibert, eines deutschen Philosophen* (Berlin and Stettin, 1798) was a parody of Kant and Fichte.

¹⁴⁵ The Father says: “Mr. Fichte must not have gotten very far into philosophical history: otherwise, he would have taken *Berkeley’s idealism* into consideration” (*A Father’s Letter to his Student Son about Fichte’s and Forberg’s Atheism*, pp. 61–62 [GA, I, 6, p. 125]).

¹⁴⁶ Fichte is indicating that the *Father’s Letter* was published anonymously.

¹⁴⁷ Johann Phillip Gabler (1753–1826) was a highly respected theologian at the University of Altdorf.

¹⁴⁸ “Appendix B” (GA, I, 6, pp. 119–20) contained a statement by Johann Phillip Gabler (1753–1826), “Nothgedrungene Protestation gegen ein falsches Gerücht” [“Obligatory Protest against a False Rumor”] that was originally published in the *Intelligencer of the Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, Nr. 13, February 2, 1799, Col. 101–2.

¹⁴⁹ Fichte included a brief extract to this effect from *Etwas zur Antwort auf das Schreiben eines Vaters an seinem studierenden Sohn über den Fichteschen und Forbergschen Atheismus: Nebst Andeutungen der Harmonie einiger religiösen Grundsätze Sokrates, Antonins, Jesus, Luthers, Kants, Fichtes und Forbergs* [Something in Answer to *A Father’s Letter to his Student Son about Fichte’s and Forberg’s Atheism: Including Suggestions about the Harmony between the Religious Principles of Sokrates, Antonin, Jesus, Luther, Kant, Fichte, und Forberg*] (Jena und Leibzig: Gabler, 1799) as “Appendix E” of the *Juridical Defense* (GA, I, 6, 144).

assurance that this foreign theologian had written it (for my news about these secret machinations goes no further). At least, the person who conceived the letter of requisition obviously had this publication before him, for the same passages quoted by the father were also selected by him.¹⁵⁰

It is this furtive publication, one in such condition, that has required scholars at some universities, that has required the highest government-sponsored colleges of five distinguished provinces, that (ever since the Hanoverian government openly attacked our names as the names of people who cherish dangerous, highly offensive, and universally harmful principles) has required a sixth (and since then the Prussian court) to take part in persecuting us, and that the seventh set in motion; it is this publication that through the immediate consequences attributed to it can still have immense and incalculable further consequences.¹⁵¹ Oh, it is through such trifles that human destiny is determined!

In the intelligencer of the A. L. Z., no. 13 (Appendix B) Dr. *Gabler* earnestly protests against the rumor that he is the author of this publication, declares this rumor to be a gross slander, leaves the propagators of this slander to their own shame and dishonor, and evaluates the publication more or less as I have done just now.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Fichte means that the person (or persons) who prepared the “Kurfürstl. Sächsisches Requisitions-schreiben an die Herzöge der Ernestischen Höfe vom 18 Decembre 1798” [Electoral Saxon Requisition Letter to the Dukes of the Ernestine Courts, 18 December 1798] (“Acta Die Confiscirung und Censur, ingleichen die Leipziger und andere Zeitungen btr. Vol. XII 1798–1800, Loc. 55 n. 8 der Geheimen Canzley in K. S. Hauptstaats-Archiv,” p. 59) and, likewise, the “Saxon Letter of Requisition to the Weimar Court” (pp. 83–84 [FG, 2, pp. 25–6, Number 697]) for Friedrich August to sign referred to *A Father’s Letter to his Student Son about Fichte’s and Forberg’s Atheism* when identifying the supposed atheistic aspects of Fichte’s and Forberg’s essays. The “Saxon Letter of Requisition to the Weimar Court” indeed echoes the Father’s language and accusations.

¹⁵¹ Fichte means Electoral Saxony and the five Ernestine Courts of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach, Saxony–Coburg–Saalfeld, Saxony–Gotha–Altenburg, and Saxony–Meiningen to which Friedrich August sent the “Kurfürstl. Sächsisches Requisitions-schreiben an die Herzöge der Ernestischen Höfe vom 18 Decembre 1798” [“Electoral Saxon Requisition Letter to the Dukes of the Ernestine Courts, 18 December 1798”]. Fichte may have also had in mind the Duchy of Braunschweig. The “Georg III: Kurhannöversche Rescript” of 14 January 1799 (FG, 6, p. 320, No. 711a) describes the banned issue of the *Philosophisches Journal* as propounding *gefährliche, höchst anstößige und gemeinschädliche* [dangerous, highly offensive, and universally shameful] principles. Friedrich August wrote a letter concerning these matters to the Minister of the Prussian King in Berlin on 18 December 1798, which was posted on 31 December 1798, but the Prussian government refused to ban the *Philosophisches Journal*. See “Friedrich Wilhelm III an das Preussische Auswärtige Amt” of 25 March 1798, FG, 6, No. 773a.

¹⁵² In his “Nothgedrungene Protestation gegen ein falsches Gerücht” [“Obligatory Protest against a False Rumor”], which was originally published in the “Intelligencer” of the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* Nr. 13, 2 February 1799, Col. 101–2, and which Fichte included as “Appendix B,” Gabler says “Ich eile um so mehr dieser Verläumdung

Who, then, wrote it? Perhaps the external circumstances of the author, his character, and his personal relations shed new light on <65> the importance that is attributed to it. Nothing prevents me from also voicing my conviction about this matter, a conviction lacking only juridical demonstrability.

I live very close to an unfortunate man, a man—I know not whether he is being punished for something already long done or whether he is being punished by unhappy fate—who has cloaked himself in shame and universal hatred and who, just like Orestes, has ever since been constantly accompanied by the Furies.¹⁵³ Since shame is his own element, and since he cannot always stand at his lectern where the unclean spirit in him plays tricks and utters obscenities, he devotes his remaining time to wallowing in his shame in order to bespatter other people, so that he will no longer have to feel so ashamed in human company. There is scarcely a man or a woman in his vicinity against whom he has not already uttered dirty slanders. He has already been entangled in numerous libel lawsuits, and he has been investigated for having uttered blasphemy at his lectern; but, so I am told, he has gotten off every time <66> by means of lies. As I write this, he is involved in two libel lawsuits, the first of which, the active one, he is conducting as clumsily and coarsely as he managed to bring about the second one, the passive one. His malicious spirit impels him to persecute anyone who receives only a little recognition, whether or not he comes into collision with that person, whether or not that person has insulted him, whether or not it is even merely possible for that person to harm him—in the way, for example, that *I* cannot come into collision with him either in a literary or an academic capacity, because we work in completely different fields and because I have never seen his face and he has not seen mine, as far as I know. In the past he has annually published attacks on honorable men under his own name.¹⁵⁴ This tradition came to an end, and ever since he has perpetrated his calumnies in the intelligencer of the <67> *Neue Deutsche Bibliothek*. There he has published several pasquinades of our estimable Dr. *Paulus* (whom he has quite particularly persecuted) and one about Privy Councilor *Schnaubert* and Superintendent *Scherer*, among others that have become known to me in the short period of time I have lived here.¹⁵⁵ Certainly, he has carried out

zu widersprechen” [“All the more so, I urgently wish to refute this slander”] and “Die Verbreiter einer solchen Verläumdung, daß ich der Verfasser sey, überlasse ich nun ihrer eignen Schaam und Schande” [“I leave the propagators of such slander, that I am the author, to their own shame and dishonor”] (GA, I, 6, pp. 119–20).

¹⁵³ Fichte implies that Christian Gottfried Gruner (1744–1815), a professor of medicine and botany at the University of Jena, wrote the *Father's Letter*.

¹⁵⁴ Between 1782 and 1797, Gruner published slanderous accounts of his colleagues in his *Almanach für Aerzte und Nichtärzte*.

¹⁵⁵ Some of the people slandered by Gruner include H. E. G. Paulus, Andreas Joseph Schnaubert (1750–1825), a Professor of Law at Jena, and Alexander Nikolaus Scherer (1771–1824), a chemist.

a number of such deeds that have not become known to me; perhaps there are no noteworthy scholars around here whom he has not yet attacked in this fashion.

Since my appointment in Jena this man has made me into a very special target of his literary calumnies, which redounds to my honor, since to a certain degree I therein take the place of the estimable Dr. *Paulus*. (I take it to be an honor to have the same enemies as Dr. Paulus.) When his tradition of annual calumny was still in existence, he did not let a year go by without denouncing me—either by name or anonymously, and (for our age) in the most dangerous manner—as an enemy <68> of religion and the state.¹⁵⁶ Since then on several occasions he has published the crudest untruths **about me** in the intelligencer of the *Neue Deutsche Bibliothek*, untruths that he himself knows to be such. The publisher of these pasquinades was rebuked by some other libeled person in a private letter and, since this did not help, by me publicly; since then nothing else from this man has been accepted by that intelligencer, and there is nothing else for him to do but to hurl anonymous, furtive pamphlets at the public.¹⁵⁷

In particular, shortly after my arrival in Jena, once he had somewhere overheard the misunderstood principle of my philosophy that everything is in the I, and nothing is outside of the I, he immediately remarked (this is what is sometimes made of that principle, and he uttered it to a person from whose own mouth I have it): “Oh, this one will not last here very long; his principles must lead to atheism, and then no prince in the land will tolerate him.” In the past five years he may have been attentively waiting until a remark finally appeared that could be passed off as a fulfillment of that prophecy. At last he <69> believed that he had found such fulfillment in that essay in my journal, and he gladly seized the opportunity.

How would it be, then, if this man were the author of that letter, a man with this universally known character, a man possessed by a similarly universally known hatred of me, this first-class ignoramus (as that work reveals him to be)? (To be sure, he is a widely known celebrity in his field, and it may be that he knows the titles of a great many books by heart as well as other things that can be learned by heart. But a man who lacks the understanding for inspecting something of which he understands nothing cannot possess judgment, true aptitude, and understanding in a particular discipline, unless reason herself is a liar.)

Everything comes together to lead us to conjecture that this man is the author. His mode of thought, his style, and especially his logic and several characteristic idiosyncrasies, e.g., his incessant complaining about the unintelligibility of all that he has not already learned about such words by heart, are unique among German scholars. I am convinced in my heart that no other human being could have written this work in this fashion. I had only to peruse a few pages to recognize him immediately. I promise, assuming that it could be worth the trouble to anyone, to

¹⁵⁶ In *Almanach für Aerzte und Nichtärzte*, Gruner claimed that the Fichte’s early writings on the French Revolution were characteristic of Jacobins and revolutionaries.

¹⁵⁷ Karl Ernst Bohn (1749–1827). Fichte published his rebuke in *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* 16 April No. 50, 16 April 1796 (GA, I, 3, p. 279).

conduct the proof of this assertion in accordance with the rules of higher criticism in such a way as has not been attempted yet.

I do not possess a proof that is admissible in court, and for this reason I do not write down the name of this man, and for this reason I here express my conviction only as a conjecture. However, if someone would like to instigate a judicial inquiry, I can point out a place to start. The *Felseker* bookstore in *Nuremberg* is selling this work; to the *Gabler* bookstore located here it sent the copy that I am including, among other things, with the appended documents. If one conducts a proper and thorough inquiry, then I do not doubt for a moment that my conjecture will be completely confirmed. If one conducts a *proper* inquiry, <70> I have said. I would not be convinced that I am in error just because third parties or this man himself deny that another person could be regarded as the author, or even if someone else would perhaps confess to really being the author. Even the latter case has occurred in our time. A certain *Schlegel* confessed to being the author of the work *Bahrdr with the Iron Brow*, but after the true author's confession emerged later, he confessed that he had by no means written it.¹⁵⁸

Therefore, it could have been such a man, and it probably *was* such a man who by such means set six governments in motion against me. One cannot avoid being touched by this sight and bemoaning the fate of eminent people. Only a little bad luck is required for a highly contemptible human being to come along and turn them into the tool of his vilest passion, his most vulgar malice!

III.

Now, of course, these governments did not know, and the initial instigators and fomenters (as I am willing to believe to their credit) knew just as little, about what I have just now said about the author of that publication. The latter, however, even if they have only been reading the scholarly journals, at least knew that I have often been libeled and have defended myself in an impossibly pleasant manner against my libelers, and that I have likewise vigorously repulsed the many literary attacks that have been launched against me. Consequently, they were able to realize that I could not be lacking in literary opponents and personal enemies. How in the world, then, did it come to pass that they did not have the slightest notion that this publication could have come from such an impure source, especially since they were aware of the author's (and the publisher's) simply inexplicable dissimulation before a politically impotent professor? How did it happen that these people, who as scholars should know something, took so little notice of that letter-writing father's shallowness and ignorance, that they even <71> made his opinions

¹⁵⁸ Traugott Friedrich Leberecht Schlegel, a former student at Jena; *Bahrdr with the Iron Brow* was actually written by A. von Kotzebue. Karl Friedrich Bahrdr (1741–92) was a theologian who studied under Christian August Crusius (1751–1775). He lived a scandalous life and was eventually imprisoned for speaking against the state religion.

into their own, and that they made his mode of argumentation, his taste, and his cherished writings into their own? This has happened in the way that, among others, a theologian—who, by the way, is suspected by the ecclesiastical court of the Electorate of Saxony on account of his *open-mindedness* (so say various published writings)—really earned himself the small merit that was tendered (page 5) to the author's Ferdinand and recommended *Sempronius Gundibert* as an excellent book to some of my students who visited him on a trip.¹⁵⁹ How is it that these people, who at least read Dr. Gabler's theological journal and should be somewhat familiar with this man's literary character, managed to take that work for one of his own? Do they really have so little critical acumen, or does their passion not allow them to employ it on this occasion? In fact, should I attribute to the supporters and representatives of the sciences in one of the leading states of Protestant Germany a shallowness and an ignorance that must still rank far below that of the letter-writer whom they have made into their authority; or should I rather believe that they have been blinded by passion and only on this occasion have not been able to make use of their usual acuteness? They profit from the latter supposition. Yet how was it possible for them to employ means that would not be used by scholars in any other part of the world: their stubborn insistence, in the face of every objection, that Dr. *Gabler* was the author of that work (which, as experience teaches, they were certainly unable to know); their freely distributing that work as if Dr. Gabler had arranged for them to do so; and their offer to produce a piece of writing by him that would place his authorship beyond doubt (which was either a lie or preparation for a forgery)? Their personal hatred of me has been clearly demonstrated in these ways.

And in what way have I insulted them? I have engaged in scholarly disputes with many writers, but not, as far as I know, with any of them. One would have to set out in a contrived manner in order to write in opposition to them. I may not say that it is scholarly jealousy, or literary envy in general, without appearing to presume for myself an importance that I perhaps do not have even for them. But what <72> is it? Others may figure this out; this point is not of any significance.

But—and this point is significant—how, then, did it come to pass that such highly suspicious insinuations were able to provoke such steps from the government of the Electorate of Saxony? I name only *this* government, for the ban that was later enacted by the Hanoverian government was promulgated at the request of this government, just as it requested a similar ban from the Prussian court.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ *A Father's Letter to his Son about Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism*, pp. 57–58 (GA, I, 6, p. 122). Neither the editors of GA nor the editors of *La Querelle de L'Athéisme* were able to identify this theologian. The editors of this translation are also unable to identify him.

¹⁶⁰ "Georg III: Kurhannöversche Rescript" of 14 January 1799 (FG, 6, p. 320, No. 711a). On 1 December 1799, Friedrich August sent letters to the governments of Prussia, Braunschweig, and Wolfenbüttel requesting that they enact bans of the offending issue of the *Philosophisches Journal*. Friedrich Wilhelm III (1770–1840), King of Prussia, refused

No conjectures or guesses are required here. The motive is clear; it is notorious, only no one is willing to call the thing by its name. I am simply not cut out to keep my opinion to myself; and I will not do so in this particular case, because I am now tired of these attacks *and intend this time either to obtain peace and quiet for the rest of my life or bravely perish*. Therefore, I will be the one who calls the thing by its name. *To them, I am a democrat, a Jacobin.*¹⁶¹ There it is. Every outrage is believed of such a person without further examination. No injustice at all can be committed against such a person. If he has not this time earned what has befallen him, then he earned it another time. In any event, it serves him right; and it is political to seize on the *most popular* accusation, the one that arouses the least attention, in order to get hold of him.

That to them I am *this*, this unpardonable democrat and Jacobin, and that for this reason I am unspeakably hateful to them, is notorious. No indiscretion (which in this entirely justified case of self-defense would not really be an indiscretion) is required for me to draw attention to certain remarks that are circulating around the estimable men who will read this work as my judges, who themselves have defended me against these utterances, and who without a doubt will recall these utterances at this point of my defense.¹⁶² This reminder of things past is not required, for I am aware of a letter written on the present occasion by a minister of the Electorate of Saxony in which our alleged atheism is plainly said to be *<73> a newly invented device of these democrats.*¹⁶³

to enact the ban, saying that he found nothing atheistic in the journal ("Friedrich Wilhelm III an das Preussische Auswärtige Amt" of 25 March 1798, FG, 6, No. 773a).

¹⁶¹ Due to youthful writings such as *Beitrag zur Berichtigung der Urtheile des Publikums über die französische Revolution, 1793* [A Contribution toward Correcting the Public's Judgment of the French Revolution, 1793] (GA, I, 1, pp. 203–404), Fichte had some reputation as a Jacobin.

¹⁶² In 1794, shortly after his arrival in Jena, a rumor began circulating in Weimar that Fichte had made revolutionary and anti-monarchical statements in his public lectures on "The Vocation of the Scholar." See the letter of 13 June 1794 written by Privy Councilor Christian Gottlob Voigt (1743–1819) to Gottlieb Hufeland (1760–1817) on p. 17 of *Fichte in vertraulichen Briefen seiner Zeitgenossen*, (ed.) Hans Schulz (Leipzig: Haessel, 1923). Later, during the winter semester of 1794–95, Fichte was formally charged by the High Consistory for violating the Sabbath and interfering with public worship because of his decision to schedule his public lecture series on "Morality for Scholars" on Sunday mornings. The journal *Eudämonia, oder Deutsches Volksglück*, which instigated this charge, continued to publish anonymous attacks on Fichte, accusing him of atheism and Jacobinism. Rumors were also circulated that Fichte intended to establish an Illuminati lodge in Jena. Finally, in 1795, Fichte engaged in an ill-fated campaign to disband the student "orders" or fraternities that culminated in riots and military intervention. Fichte was exonerated during these crises and scandals by the Weimar Court ministers Goethe and C. G. Voigt, but his exoneration was usually achieved in such a manner that he was prevented from defending himself publicly and was forced to assume partial blame by default.

¹⁶³ The editors cannot identify the minister or missive in question.

Therefore—this is the result of all that has been said up to now—this accusation has been fabricated by the unprincipled, turbulent petulance of a man mortified by his reputation, propagated by literary jealousy, and seized on and made use of by the hatred of my alleged democratism, in order to ruin me. It is not my atheism that they are persecuting by judicial means; it is my democratism. The former only provided the occasion. If I defend myself only against what people are actually allowed to hear, then the proceedings against me will only be postponed; people will continue to hate me and wish me ill, and they will seize the next opportunity to catch hold of me even more tightly. I must, if I wish to win any peace and quiet for myself in the future, go straight at the true source of the accusation; I must defend myself primarily against what they merely think in their hearts.

Therefore, I am a democrat. What, then, is a democrat? Perhaps he is the sort of person who regards democratically constituted government as the only legitimate one, and who recommends that it be introduced. I should think that if he merely does so in learned publications, even under a monarchical government, then the refutation of this opinion, if it is incorrect, could be left to other scholars. As long as he performs no *external action* in order actually to overthrow the existing constituted governments and to put in their place the one that he prefers, I do not see how his *opinion* can even come before a governmental tribunal, before which only *deeds* belong. But I know that my opponents think differently about this point than I. They may think what they will. Does this accusation fit me, and am I, then, a democrat in the aforementioned sense of the word? Of course, ever since they fixed their concept of me and wrote “democrat” above my picture in their imagination, they may not have heard anything more about me or read anything else by me. If so, then let them now read an excerpt from my *Foundations of Natural Right*, Part I, pages 189ff.¹⁶⁴ No one can name for them another writer who has declared himself more decisively and with more forceful reasons in opposition to the democratic form of government for being a constitution that is absolutely illegitimate. Let them take an honest excerpt from that book. <74> They will find that I demand submission to the law as well as its superintendence of the actions of citizens, and that I do so in a manner in which these things have neither been thought by any of their teachers of constitutional law nor realized in any of their constitutions. Most of the complaints that I have heard lodged against this system related to the fact that it would do so great an injury to the freedom (licentiousness and lawlessness) of human beings. Consequently, I am quite far from preaching anarchy.

Yet it is unlikely that they should connect a determinate sense to the word, and the **scientifically** correct sense. It would perhaps be possible for me to say, if all of the occasions in which they make use of this expression were to be taken together, which concept they actually connect to it; and it is very possible that I am quite decidedly a democrat in this sense. At least it is just as certain that I would prefer

¹⁶⁴ The passage to which Fichte refers is found in FNR, pp. 139–41 (GA, I, 3, pp. 313–15).

not to be subject to caprice rather than the law. However, this explanation is not required; I can defend myself without it.

Well, then, if a young person who had given up his native land and adhered to no state, and who was then living as a guest in a small northern republic when he departed from it, in the days when it was devoured, for a southern republic; if this young person, overcome with indignation at the exaggerations that the defenders of the lawless caprice of the powerful permit themselves, had likewise exaggerated a little for his own part in order to strike a balance; if it were still unsettled whether or not he had really exaggerated, and if it were still unsettled whether or not even these apparent exaggerations were his true opinions at the time, seeing that he only produced a fragment, showed only one part of one side, and was not allowed to proceed to explain the other side in his method of that time; if the same person, who has in the meantime become a man, avoided all one-sidedness in a mature, well-reasoned work on the very same topic and <75> (it is to be hoped) satisfied every policy maker *who may simply say aloud whatever he would like*—would it then be just and fair still to employ the juvenile and incomplete essay of the youth as the standard by which to measure the political principles of the man?¹⁶⁵

If so, then it would have to be conceded that as citizens scholars are responsible to the state for their theoretical opinions, which is something that no true scholar will ever concede. What, then, did this hated democrat do when he is said to have committed this literary sin, when he was everywhere a guest and had no obligation to any state beyond that of a guest, what, then, did he do during that time in order to realize his alleged democratic principles? I will myself provide the most precise information about where and with whom I was living at that time to whomever is interested in engaging at present in the most painstaking and most precise inquiry into this matter; and if I am found guilty in the slightest degree, if even only one suspicious publication from my life up to now can be pointed out to me, then I will acknowledge that I am guilty of all the sins that my most malicious enemy can only impute to me. What is it in my character (which they do not know about me) that must absolutely place me above all suspicion and puts me in a position to issue them the bold challenge of most strenuously examining my entire life? (I will describe it more fully below.) *It is my thorough-going love of a speculative life.*

For five years I have uninterruptedly lived in one place.¹⁶⁶ There I am exposed to public view; and without a doubt I have been closely observed because the interest that many hateful and embittered people took in me required that I be

¹⁶⁵ Fichte is alluding to his stay in Danzig during the winter of 1792–93 and to leaving Danzig for Zürich in March of 1793 after the entry of Prussian troops during the first division of Poland. The “juvenile and incomplete essay” to which he refers is *Beitrag zur Berichtigung der Urtheile des Publikums über die französische Revolution, 1793* [*A Contribution toward Correcting the Public's Judgment of the French Revolution, 1793*] (GA, I, 1, pp. 203–404). The “mature, well-reasoned work” to which he refers is FNR.

¹⁶⁶ Fichte had lived in Jena since 1794.

observed. I have been tested in all sorts of ways. What, then, was discovered about me?

I have to defend myself. Consequently, it will be necessary to talk about myself. Necessity excuses me if I seem presumptuous.

Have I ever sanctioned, supported, or aroused unrest, disorder, or illegality in my sphere of influence? As the most illustrious patrons of the university and the entire public of the lands of Ducal Saxony know, I have instead dedicated myself to checking the main source of all lawlessness at this academy.¹⁶⁷ Of course, I have not succeeded, and I was in fact wrong to make the attempt. On the one hand, I should have known that I could not have stamped out the offended faction's prejudice against me in such a short time, that this faction expects nothing good of me, <76> and that this faction need only know that I am originating a plan in order for them [to attempt] to thwart it. On the other hand, I should have known that one's betters will never invariably comply with the plan of an inferior. Unfortunately, one learns certain truths only by means of experience; however, the person who is not completely foolish retains them for the rest of his life. It is enough to know that the students are now of the unanimous opinion that I meant well.

Has anyone ever had to call me to account for any offence against the laws? It is true that I was once accused, but to my honor, not to that of my accusers, I was acquitted.¹⁶⁸ This was done to universal public approval after the public was informed of the true facts of the matter when the documents were reproduced without my assistance.¹⁶⁹

It is true that I have been maligned many times with regard to remarks that I have been said to have made at the lectern. I speak of nothing at the lectern the content of which does not lie before the public in a printed form. In particular, I have publicized through the press those lectures (on the vocation of the scholar) that have most vigorously met with such defamation, and the incriminating remarks were not found in them.¹⁷⁰ No art is involved in maligning someone behind his back; and there is in fact nothing friendly in hiding these secret, wrongful accusations from the one whom they concern. One need not be concerned about me. I guarantee that I will refute every wrongful accusation, provided that it is made known to me; for I will certainly never do anything improper.

In short, therefore, I have not been found guilty of anything. But perhaps I am conducting a suspicious foreign correspondence? This should have been known

¹⁶⁷ Fichte is referring to his attempt to disband the student orders at the University of Jena.

¹⁶⁸ Fichte is referring to the formal charge of violating the Sabbath, which was issued by the Jena Consistory. After an investigation by the university senate, Fichte was exonerated.

¹⁶⁹ The "Blätter aus dem Archiv der Toleranz und Intoleranz" (1797) published Fichte's written defense to the charge (GA, I, 4, pp. 391–420).

¹⁷⁰ "Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar's Vocation," EPW, pp. 144–84 (GA, I, 3, pp. 23–68).

by now, for in the initial years of my residence in this place there was no failure <77> to intercept letters by or to me or to allow them to arrive opened. For a long time I have not noticed that anyone is making such a pointless effort. And this is the right thing to do, for my letters are usually not worth a third party's effort to open them.

Or have I written any dubious anonymous works during my residence in this place? Not even a faint suspicion has fallen on me in this regard. The only thing that I may say on this occasion is this: I have witnesses to the fact that I have suppressed ill-advised writings that have been sent to me in order to be forwarded to the press. This was done until people seem finally to have learned my principles regarding such matters and no longer make such a pointless effort.

Is, then, my personal and civic character, is my situation, of a sort that there would be some semblance of reason in presupposing that I wish for a political revolution? The only ones who harbor a wish for revolution are those who are driven by a constant restlessness; who have no occupation or take no pleasure in their occupation; who are entangled with their fellow citizens through hatred and strife; who find enmity and want at home and disgrace and debts outside of the home; who squander what is theirs and thus hanker after what belongs to others; who, since they have nothing to lose, can only gain during outbreaks of violence, i.e., restless citizens, bad entrepreneurs, and wretched husbands and heads of households. Those who know me, and among whom I have lived for five years, may answer whether or not this picture contains any trait that fits me. Four years ago the academic senate gave me a praiseworthy report on my blameless conduct; I am quite certain that they would not retract it now.¹⁷¹ I can gladly say that in these five years I have made peace with the greatest portion of my enemies in my immediate vicinity. Allow me to live among them for another five years and they will love me.

But I am a *scholar*; and in the opinion of esteemed policy makers, besides the propertyless and lawless rabble, some among the scholarly class are said to be dissatisfied with the fact that they do not occupy even the lowest posts in the government. Together with the rabble, they alone are said to be the ones who wish for a revolution in the existing state constitutions. I do not know and cannot know whether or not there are generally any such scholars as these policy makers describe them; however, those policy makers will permit me to inform them of an infallible criterion [for deciding] which individuals do *not* belong to this class. <78> *They are the ones who love their science and demonstrate that it has taken possession of their entire spirit.* The love of science, and more especially the love of speculation, once it has taken hold of a person, so captivates him that he retains no other wish except that of occupying himself with it in peace. From without he only requires tranquility. For this reason revolutionary times are simply contrary to his wishes. He carries inner peace within himself.

¹⁷¹ Fichte is referring to the academic senate's report of its investigation of his Sunday morning lectures on "Morality for Scholars" (GA, I, 4, pp. 384–87).

Those who know my mode of life and how I make use of my time may judge whether or not I might not rightfully appropriate a place for myself among the latter class; and even the vast public, before whom my efforts of the past five years are on display (but before whom by no means not all of my efforts are on display, and still less the time that I have expended on my lectures) may likewise judge! Whoever knows me and my situation more closely may judge whom I might envy, what I might otherwise prefer to be, and what I might gain by means of a change of government. The public provides me with my livelihood; never before have my wishes reached beyond the means of satisfying them; and I envy no one on this account and yield to no one. If I wanted to rule, then my inclinations would drive me even further to do so in the realm of concepts (which I understand), to order this realm to clarify and arrange itself in formation, rather than to command human beings (which I have never learned nor practiced), who are willful, difficult to direct, and so rarely open to reason. If fame could rouse me ... oh, I live in a nation and in an age in which the name of a scholar who is not unhappily working at his science is no doubt mentioned as often as the names of other people!

I cannot wish for a revolution, for my wishes are satisfied. I cannot intend to cause or support any revolution, for I have no time for that. My time is dedicated to entirely different things that require tranquility. It would be something completely new and unprecedented in human history if the creator of a new, entirely speculative system were to place himself at the head of a political revolution. It is certainly to be expected that a not entirely foolish person, just as he is emerging from his youth, will draw up a plan for his life. Long ago I drew up such a plan. To begin with, I have to present my philosophical system clearly and completely. Besides that, there is still much to do. From this system will emerge other new discoveries, which I will then investigate. A transition to other sciences is becoming evident to me, as well as a complete <79> transformation of several of them, which will give me work to do after I complete those tasks. And if I saw a centuries-long life before me, I would already know how to apportion these centuries in such a way so entirely in keeping with my inclinations that not a single hour would be left over for revolutionary activities.

A man's literary conduct surely reveals his character. Whoever hurls himself with restless activity into one science today and into another one tomorrow; whoever busies himself everywhere but nowhere finishes anything; whoever seeks out in every discipline that which attracts attention, catches one's eye, and is conspicuous; whoever hangs around and flatters prominent and significant people—the suspicion of having revolutionary intentions might possibly fall on such a person. But surely not on me; I do the precise opposite of all these things. That I became known to a large portion of the public earlier than I had anticipated was entirely and solely caused by my opponents through their attacks and the manner thereof. My I and not-I did not possess the standing to attract the attention of other people except for a few trusted specialists in speculation, and even among

them it did so only belatedly.¹⁷² Everyone who knows me must admit this much: if I have ambitious intentions, then I am acting quite perversely in carrying them out.

If all of this is notorious, what, then, is meant by the cry “He is a democrat!”? What is meant by the inextinguishable suspicion, by the bitter hatred with which—for I am tired of talking only about myself—a great many meritorious scholars and writers throughout Germany are persecuted, scholars and writers who have been found as free of guilt as I have? What is meant by the terroristic system of defamation that is taken up with so much pleasure, so strongly supported, and rewarded in such a princely fashion? If it were really true that some of these writers had not credited some existing governments with good intentions, that they suspected them of illegality and violence, would these same writers then be refuted by being treated in a genuinely violent fashion—and by using weapons against them that are otherwise employed by only the most vulgar among the people, i.e., with the weapons of defamation? If it were true that some among these writers were averse to the existing governments, would they then become reconciled to them by the fact that these governments constantly receive them in fear and seize every opportunity to destroy them? However, one does not wish to reconcile them; for that there rests a power in the human breast that does not permit itself to be shackled or replaced by any mechanism, and that this capacity is not an ally to be despised, people <80> are not yet willing to acknowledge. Will one thus only wreak vengeance? For governments, this goal would be too petty; only offended subordinates can have this goal. But, unfortunately, governments are often unknowingly made into the instruments of these base passions.

I hereby declare with the firmest sincerity that there is currently no other country in Europe in which I would rather live than Germany, and that there is no situation I desire more than the one in which I really find myself. I only require a tranquil environment and personal security; everything else I will supply myself. Up to now German laws have furnished me with those two goods. If, however, it should now really come to this, and a plan were made and its execution should begin among us, that for authors there would no longer be tranquility and civil security in Germany, that everyone except for them would be protected by the laws, then nothing would be left but to go wherever we are expelled. Wherever one can reckon that only force holds sway, there one can certainly hope to win a portion of it over to one’s own side in order to protect oneself with it. The only situation that is entirely unbearable is the one in which the law restricts us but does not protect us. And it is to be hoped that a great many upright Germans think in this fashion.

I am not exaggerating; I am not painting everything black. My governments do not want me to complain or to fear persecution. Honorable members thereof

¹⁷² In the *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, 1794 (GA, I, 2, pp. 250–451), Fichte used the terms “I” and “Not-I” to characterize the duality of consciousness expressed in the fundamental principles of his philosophy.

have no doubt been surprised by what I said in my *Appeal to the Public* (which was not directed against the complaint that was entirely unknown to me at the time, but rather against the accusation of atheism contained in the *confiscatory rescript*).¹⁷³ They want me to give myself over peacefully to the protection of their just, enlightened, and magnanimous authority; they want me not to help myself, to defend myself as mildly as possible.¹⁷⁴ God protect my understanding from the confusion of not putting my trust in these governments! The spirit of the purest trust blows throughout this entire written defense. They will certainly defend me against what they *can* and what they *must*.

They will protect my body. Unlike for *Vanini*, a funeral pyre will thus not be built for me in the Ernestine lands.¹⁷⁵ They will not ignominiously dismiss me from my office and banish me. They will also not make an exception and inflict on me what in this context would be a punitive and degrading restriction of my instructional and literary freedom. They will also not allow a juridical reprimand to be issued against me; and they will do nothing that will affect my honor and good name, which I value more highly than life.¹⁷⁶

But can they—can any power on earth—make amends for what *has actually already been done* to me? Can they wash away the brand that has been stamped on my forehead before the eyes of the nation?

Honor, a good reputation, and the trust of the nation matter more than anything else to the scholar, especially the academic scholar, who does not depend on a narrow circle but rather on the entire nation; for they are the sole condition of all of his efficacy. He exists only on account of them. And in particular I can add—this comes *last of all* for me, but it is something that my judges will probably take into consideration—that I will have no more bread if I have no more honor. My honor, however, cannot be attacked more irreparably than by precisely the accusation of atheism that has been raised against me. This accusation is what immediately contaminates and poisons. I must defend myself against it as much as I can. But I will never be able to defend myself against it entirely. There are hundreds in Germany (and they are not to be found among the lower classes) who will have nothing at all to do with this defense; and who, because one goes so far as to prove, and has ten times proven, to them that one is absolutely not denying God and religion but rather enjoining belief in them, revert to the old saying: “But one must

¹⁷³ The “complaint,” which was unknown to Fichte at the time, was the old accusation of Jacobinism.

¹⁷⁴ An allusion to Friedrich Schiller’s letter of 26 January 1799 (GA, III, 3, Number 410, p. 183).

¹⁷⁵ The “Ernestine lands” were those ruled by the Ernestine branch of the Wettin family. Karl August is of the Ernestine line. Giulio Cesare—originally Lucilio—Vanini (1585–1619), an Italian priest, was convicted of atheism and strangled and burned at the stake, but he was executed in Toulouse, France, not the Ernestine lands.

¹⁷⁶ See Fichte’s letter concerning this passage to C. G. Voigt of 22 March 1799 (GA, III, 3, p. 285).

not take God to the people” (real unbelief is a distinguishing mark for them). There are thousands who will understand the accusation quite well, but not the defense. There are many thousands who will be aware of the accusation but in their entire lives will not hear a single word to the effect that there was ever even a defense offered in reply. The aversion impressed on the souls of all of these people remains undisturbed. And in what myriad ways they can all influence my efficacy! For example, among them there are quite certainly many instructors of young people <82> who are inalterably impressing their aversion to my name on tender minds. That is, on minds whose mode of thought can have consequences for me in the future; with whom, in the course of nature, I will have to live; among whom there can be my future superiors, colleagues, and subordinates; out of whom I could have found students, readers, and friends. From my earliest youth I recall that I first learned the names of Voltaire and Rousseau because in a school lesson an otherwise worthy instructor implored God in His mercy to convert these two evil men.¹⁷⁷ Only belatedly did I learn to overcome the aversion that afterwards used to grip me whenever someone mentioned these men, from whose writings I later nonetheless learned a great deal that was good; and I am convinced that a great many people are still living who have not yet and will never overcome the hatred that was implanted in them by such a solemn invocation. Who knows which zealot, while I am writing this, is standing before his pupils and likewise imploring God in His mercy to convert me, and is thereby consigning my name to the loathing of the next generation? In short, whatever I may do, and whatever others may do, and even if the government of the Electorate of Saxony itself were to post in every public place throughout the entire German empire a solemn recantation of its accusation as well as a letter in praise of me, the brand that has damaged my honor and my good name will never be fully removed as long as I live. Only I will not take it with me to the afterlife. With my death it will devolve upon the originators and disseminators of this accusation, who would have so gladly provoked personal persecution against me; and their names, alongside the names of Alba and Joachim Lange, will convey undying shame if they do not recant in good time and do all that they can in order to make amends for the harm done to me.¹⁷⁸

This irreparable attack on my good name is thus obviously an unjustified assault on an innocent person. Everyone in a well-ordered state ought to be able to remain in possession of all of the honor and all of the good name that he has managed to acquire for himself and that he has not forfeited through his own actions. I have clearly proven that I have done nothing to be declared a godless person before the

¹⁷⁷ François-Marie Arouet “Voltaire” (1694–1778) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–78).

¹⁷⁸ Fernando Álvarez de Toledo y Pimental, the third Duke of Alba, (1507–1573) was a Spanish general notorious for his cruelty. After the siege of Wittenberg, the Duke of Alba participated in the trial of Johann Friedrich I “the Magnanimous,” Elector of Saxony. Johann Friedrich’s death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. Upon his eventual release, Johann Friedrich I gave special care to the University of Jena.

nation. Meanwhile, the government of the Electorate of Saxony has done this, and the Hanoverian government has imitated it.

No one will issue a retraction; everyone will judge in this fashion. So, then, I must <83> endure whatever a power with which I cannot remonstrate does to me. But let me at least gain something thereby: if people are not willing to be just, then at least let them be reasonable. I have offended them; they believed it necessary to take revenge for this. They have taken it, more than was sufficient. I have been punished enough; I will be in ill repute for the rest of my life. Let that be vengeance enough.

From this moment on let us agree to a general amnesty. Never again will my peers and I touch on those familiar points, any reference to which they dread so much. Our injuries have taught us that the present day is not a time for peaceful discussion, wherein one might expect a hearing for reasons and (if need be) objections, and that passion (which erroneously believes that every proposition disagreeable to it shall immediately be realized in life) takes part in the dispute at once. However, let them not disturb us while we tend to other business that makes absolutely no difference to them, e.g., our inquiries regarding substance, the applicability of the principle of causality, given (or not given) matter, and the like; if they wish, let them make a joke of these inquiries in the manner of Nicolai and his accomplices, for this would certainly be the only use that they can have for them; only let them not ban these inquiries by means of a threat of serious punishment. They have another use besides providing amusement.

Let them grant us civil security provided that we live as peaceful, respectable citizens; and let them do us no harm with regard to the honor and good name that everyone can acquire for himself. Let them no longer favor the defamation raised against us by courtiers, eudaemonists, and the like; let them go even less astray by issuing libelous edicts against us, printing them in all the newspapers, and posting them in all the public places. Let them grant us this reasonable request, and we will give them our word that we will never trouble them with another request.

May Your Magnificence lay this defense of ours, these wishes and hopes of ours, upon which the tranquility of our lives rests, along with the evidence of our deepest reverence, at the feet of our most illustrious dukes; or, more properly speaking, may you impress it upon the wise understanding and the noble, magnanimous hearts of our most illustrious dukes, whom divine providence <84> gave us as our authorities to compensate for the persecution and bitterness that it allotted to our lives; before whom we may allow all of our complaints to be made known, since none of them affect them; and whom we are able to revere with free and joyful veneration.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ “Your Magnificence” refers to the prorector of the University of Jena to whom the *Juridical Defense* is addressed. The editors of GA and the editors of *La Querelle de L’Athéisme* identify the prorector as Justus Christian Loder. Anthony La Vopa and Erich Fuchs identify the prorector as H. E. G. Paulus.

Chapter 8

Ernst II Ludwig: “Gotha Rescript to the University of Jena”

Commentary

A few days before the publication of J. G. Fichte’s *Appeal to the Public*, H. E. G. Paulus, the prorector of the University of Jena, had instructed Fichte to answer to the charge of publishing atheistic essays in the *Philosophisches Journal*.¹ In response, Fichte and F. I. Niethammer, the co-editors of the journal, submitted a joint defense to the patrons of the university, the Dukes of the Ernestine Courts.² While the patrons were still examining Fichte’s *Juridical Defense*, Fichte sent a copy of the *Appeal to the Public* to Karl August, the Duke of Weimar, and then, a letter (threatening to resign if formally censured) to Christian Gottlob Voigt, the Duke’s councilor.³ After showing this letter to Karl August, Voigt and Goethe

¹ The *Appeal to the Public* (pp. 92–125 [GA, I, 5, pp. 415–53]) appeared in print on 15 January 1799. See FG, 5, p. 272. Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus (1761–1851), a theologian and oriental linguist, wrote to Fichte on 10 January 1799 (GA, III, 3, p. 171). He was responding to a rescript demanding an investigation of Fichte and Niethammer that was sent from Duke Karl August (1757–1828) to the University of Jena (“Weimar Rescript to the University of Jena,” p. 84 [FG, 6, p. 316, No. 702a]).

² Fichte and Niethammer submitted a joint defense, which was divided into two parts: the first by Fichte, *J. G. Fichtes als Verfassers des ersten angeklagten Aufsatzes, und Mitherausgebers des Philosophischen Journals Verantwortungsschrift* [*J. G. Fichte’s Defense as an Author of the First of the Accused Essays and as a Co-editor of the Philosophisches Journal*] and the second by Niethammer, *Friedrich I. Niethammers als Mitherausgebers des Philosophischen Journals Verantwortungsschrift* [*Friedrich I. Niethammer’s Defense as Co-Editor of the Philosophisches Journal*]. See *Juridical Defense*, pp. 157–204 (GA, I, 6, pp. 26–84). On 18 March 1799, Fichte and Niethammer notified the Senate of the University of Jena that their defense had been sent directly to the patrons of the university, the Dukes of the Ernestine Courts. On 23 March 1799, Justus Ferdinand Christian Loder (1753–1832), an anatomist and the rector of the University of Jena, sent a report about the investigation of Fichte and Niethammer to the patrons (FG, 6.1, pp. 366–67, No. 771b).

³ Fichte wrote to Christian Gottlob (von) Voigt (1743–1819) on 22 March 1799 (“Fichte an Christian Gottlob Voigt” [“Fichte to Christian Gottlob Voigt”] of 22 March 1799, GA III, 3, pp. 283–86, No. 431). For details about Fichte’s *Appeal to the Public* and *Juridical Defense*, and for details of his ill-fated communications with the Weimar Court, see FSCP, pp. 368–401 and 402–24.

drafted a rescript from the Duke to the University of Jena with instructions to reprimand Fichte and “accept” his “resignation.”⁴ Karl August solicited approval of this edict from the other Ernestine Dukes.⁵ The “Rescript to the University of Jena” from Duke Ernst II Ludwig of Gotha is only one of various missives sent during the ensuing glut of communication between Weimar, the other Ernestine courts, and the University of Jena, but it is a good example of how the Ernestine Dukes reacted to Fichte’s *Juridical Defense* and ill-conceived letter to Voigt.⁶

Ernst II Ludwig was a lover of the sciences, especially physics and astronomy, but he was also a devotee of the fantastic and uncanny: a protector of the Illuminist Adam Weishaupt and a supporter of the physiognomist Johann Kaspar Lavater.⁷ Under his rule, the Duchy of Saxony–Gotha–Altenburg became something of a haven for the odder forms of mysticism and pietism, which made it a curious ally of the enlightened, sophisticated Duchy of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach. Nonetheless, Karl August was particularly eager to gain Gotha’s support in condemning Fichte and Niethammer; and Ernst II Ludwig was expressly agreeable to endorsing Weimar’s decision to dismiss Fichte. The “Gotha Rescript to the University of Jena” anticipates and reiterates the reactions of the other Ernestine courts in their communiqués regarding Fichte and Niethammer’s defense: Their defense employs a “newly coined” and “unintelligible” lexis, which fails to exonerate them from the charge of editorial negligence.⁸ Ernst II Ludwig encourages the University of Jena to formally reprimand Fichte and Niethammer for propagating notions likely to “be interpreted and understood in the most offensive manner.”⁹ Moreover, the university should publicize this rebuke as a warning to all other instructors so they

⁴ Voigt and Johann Wolfgang (von) Goethe (1749–1832), who was also one of the Duke’s privy-councilors, met in Kötschau on 24 March 1799. See FG, 5, p. 275. The rescript, “Karl August von Sachsen–Weimar–Eisenach: Rescript an die Universität Jena” of 29–31 March, (FG, 2, pp. 90–91, No. 779) was received on 1 April 1799. Fichte was then notified of his dismissal by Paulus. See FG, 5, p. 275.

⁵ “Karl August von Sachsen–Weimar–Eisenach: Kanzleischreiben an die Herzöge von Sachsen–Gotha–Altenburg, Sachsen–Coburg–Saalfeld, und Sachsen–Meiningen” of 29 and 30 March 1799, FG, 2, p. 92, No. 781.

⁶ “Gotha Rescript to the University of Jena,” pp. 213–14 (“Ernst II Ludwig von Sachsen–Gotha–Altenburg an die Universität Jena” of 3 April 1799, FG, 6.1, pp. 381–82 and 384, No. 792a.). Fichte’s threat to resign was then infamous because Voigt had advertised it throughout Weimar and the other courts.

⁷ Adam Weishaupt (1748–1830) was a philosopher of law and an enemy of transcendental idealism, who is known mostly for founding the “order of perfectibilists” or Illuminati. After losing his professorship at the University of Ingolstadt, he fled from Bavaria and sought asylum in Gotha. Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741–1801) was a quasi-mystical poet and pastor, who is known mostly for his writings on physiognomy. Ernst II was irked that certain intellectuals, such as Goethe, mocked Lavater’s half-baked speculations.

⁸ “Gotha Rescript to the University of Jena,” pp. 213–14 (FG, 6.1, p. 382, No. 792a.).

⁹ Ibid.

will "observe an appropriate discretion" about the themes of God and religion "in all their lectures."¹⁰ It should be impressed upon all the instructors that their foremost duties consist in promoting the welfare and reputation of the university and teaching "useful and wholesome" subjects to the youth.¹¹ Finally, in a post script, Ernst II Ludwig addresses Fichte's "hasty and extremely improper" offer to resign if reproached by the courts: Fichte may consider the condition for his resignation to be fulfilled; he may consider himself to be dismissed from Jena; anyone inclined to join him in exile may consider himself to be dismissed as well.¹² The Duke of Gotha "anticipates the conformity of the other princely patrons" in this matter; and the anticipated conformity is forthcoming.¹³

The other princely patrons send their own rescripts discounting Fichte and Niethammer's defense, ratifying Fichte and Niethammer's condemnation, and endorsing Fichte's dismissal.¹⁴ Perhaps each patron wagged his princely head over the unhappy low point of the atheism debacle. Needless, pointless, absurd: "Oh, it is through such trifles that human destiny is determined!"¹⁵ To be sure, it had been a sensitive matter involving the conflicting requirements of various delicate creatures: beleaguered electors with their hysterical consistories, image-conscious dukes with their cosseted ministers, and hypersensitive scholars with their overactive intellects. Nonetheless, there had been a plan, a clever plan. Karl August, Goethe, and Voigt's plan would have settled the atheism issue with nary a crinkle of the princely brows, and only the slightest ruffle of the Fichtean feathers.¹⁶ Duke Karl August would have pacified the Saxon Elector Friedrich August and the Dresden High Consistory by delegating an "investigation" of Fichte

¹⁰ Likewise, all the instructors should be reminded that indiscretion about God and religion is not only harmful to the commonwealth but also *harmful to indiscreet instructors* ("The Gotha Rescript," p. 213 [FG, 6.1, p. 382, No. 792a.]).

¹¹ This is especially important as many of these youths will also enter the teaching profession (Ibid.).

¹² "The Gotha Rescript," pp. 213–14 (FG, 6.1, pp. 382 and 384, No. 792a.). Fichte had also claimed in his unfortunate letter to Voigt that many of his colleagues were prepared to join him in founding a rival university, according to rumor, in Mainz ("Fichte an Christian Gottlob Voigt" of 22 March 1799, GA III, 3, p. 285, No. 431).

¹³ "The Gotha Rescript," pp. 213–14 (FG, 6.1, pp. 382 and 384 No. 792a.).

¹⁴ Numerous other examples of the correspondence between Weimar, the other Ernestine courts, and the University of Jena may be found in FG, 2 and FG, 6.1. Given the sheer volume of missives regarding Fichte, one wonders that the Ernestine Dukes, the courtiers, and the university representatives were able to accomplish anything other than drafting, signing, and posting rescripts and reports. One must count as good fortune, for the sake of these careworn officials, that there were no computers or electronic mail at their disposal.

¹⁵ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 190–91 (GA, I, 6, p. 64).

¹⁶ See "Voigt an Goethe" ["Voigt to Goethe"] of 25 December 1798, FG, 2, pp. 27–29, No. 700 and "Goethe an C. G. Voigt" ["Goethe to C. G. Voigt"] of 26 (?) December 1798, FG, 2, p. 32, No. 702.

and Niethammer's "atheism."¹⁷ The University of Jena would have secured Karl August and the other Ernestine Dukes' reputations as firm but merciful despots by "reprimanding" Fichte and Niethammer for "negligence." Fichte and Niethammer would have demonstrated their veneration of the good lords (and the Good Lord) by "accepting" this reproach and would have retained their honor by continuing to scribble their "unintelligible" theories.

All the Ernestine Dukes required was that Fichte and Niethammer comply with Karl August's stratagem for keeping peace throughout the noble courts of Saxony. The command for a defense, an investigation, and a report meant specifically, a tactful concession of guilt, a contrite apology, and a public announcement that nobility and orthodoxy had received their due.¹⁸ Fichte understands but declines to perform his assigned role in the charade.¹⁹ He denies the charge against him as "an unjustified assault on an innocent person," reproaches his accusers for being "atheistic, idolatrous, blasphemous, corrupting, and fundamentally pernicious," and declares himself accountable only to his "own conscience, the learned public, and humanity."²⁰ As if that were not enough to seal his fate, Fichte refuses to accept that the princely patrons have no inclination to learn his "newly coined" terminology or to decipher his "unintelligible" arguments because they have no interest in the rationality and sincerity of his philosophical, religious, or moral principles.

Fichte hoped that in the "immemorial" battle against the obscurantists—the enemies of enlightenment—the patrons of the University of Jena stood with the friends of light—those who "strive to perfect mankind's knowledge as well as its affairs."²¹ However, the Ernestine Dukes, like Fichte's obscurantist "actual

¹⁷ "Weimarer Rescript to the University of Jena," p. 84 (FG, 6.1, p. 316, No. 702a).

¹⁸ Karl August to the University of Jena: "[W]e most graciously desire that you will question the aforementioned professors as to how they justify what they have done [...] and that you will make a report of the outcome and enclose the records" ("Weimar Rescript to the University of Jena," p. 84 [FG, 6.1, p. 316, No. 702a]). Ernst II Ludwig expresses consternation that Fichte and Niethammer "decided to challenge accusation made against them," indicating his fellow dukes' expectation that Fichte and Niethammer's defense would consist of a confession and apology wherein they perhaps revealed the circumstances extenuating their guilt ("The Gotha Rescript," pp. 213–14 [FG, 6.1, p. 382, No. 792a.]).

¹⁹ "My governments do not want me to complain or to fear persecution. [...] They want me to give myself over peacefully to the protection of their just, enlightened, and magnanimous authority; they want me not to help myself, to defend myself as mildly as possible. God protect my understanding from the confusion of not putting my trust in these governments!" (J. G. Fichte: *Juridical Defense*, p. 202 [GA, I, 6, p. 80]). See also "Fichte an Karl Leonhard Reinhold" ["Fichte to Karl Leonhard Reinhold"] of 22 May 1799, GA, III, 3, pp. 354–55, 364–67, No. 448.

²⁰ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 167–68, 182–83, 203–204 (GA, I, 6, pp. 82, 38, and 56).

²¹ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 183–84 (GA, I, 6, p. 57): "From time immemorial there has been and, as long as there are human beings, there will continually be two great factions:

accuser," would reply to the *Juridical Defense*: "Your mistake is already found in, and consists precisely of, the fact *that you demonstrate and reason*. In fact, you are arguing with weapons that are forbidden. You should *believe and obey*."²² Although Fichte knows "[t]here is certainly not a single obscurantist who does not reject this name and who does not regard himself as enlightened," he will not believe that beneath their masks of enlightenment, Karl August, Voigt, and Goethe are the obscurantists: "According to them, enlightenment is a good thing, but their opponents take it too far."²³

For the Ernestine courts, enlightenment is expendable; and for the Weimar Court particularly, obstinate professors who hinder their princely patron's worldly ambitions with their enlightened antics are very expendable indeed. Karl August, Voigt, and Goethe had decided before the *Juridical Defense* that the nuisance Fichte posed to Weimar offset the glory he brought to Jena. The terminal stage of the Herr Doctor Professor's influence had been initiated, so the only remaining question was how to conclude it without embarrassing the Weimar Court.²⁴ After Fichte's *Appeal to the Public* appeared,²⁵ Voigt worried that the educated public might resist if Fichte were reprimanded or dismissed, but Karl August assured his councilor that Weimar only need secure the aid of the uneducated public (of Gotha) to be rid of their troublesome professor.²⁶ Meanwhile, Voigt soothed Fichte, assuring him of his safety in Weimar's hands. Even while Karl August and his councilors made preparations to force Fichte's resignation and solicited endorsement from the other Ernestine Dukes, they continued to feign an honest

those who hold fast to what is time-honored and do not tolerate the least disturbance therein, who indeed attempt to turn back the clock; and those who go forward and strive to perfect mankind's knowledge as well as its affairs. The former are nowadays called *obscurantists*; and for the sake of brevity I will make use of that name here, especially since this faction as it appears here surely cannot object to this name, which is unfair in many other circumstances but not in the present one. The latter may be called *friends of light*."

²² *Juridical Defense*, pp. 184–85 (GA, I, 6, p. 58). Fichte persisted in the futile wish that the princely patrons, the obscurantists, and the actual accusers were not one and the same: "I know quite well that this defense of mine will accomplish nothing with my actual accuser. When he finishes reading it—if he actually does so—he will say: 'Fichte should not reason; he should yield.' I do not write this defense for him but rather to show those who can protect me from his aggressive behavior that I am worthy of such protection" (Ibid.).

²³ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 185–86 (GA, I, 6, p. 59).

²⁴ For details about the roles of Karl August, Voigt and Goethe in these events, see FSCP, pp. 402–24. For details about the roles of Karl August, Voigt, Goethe, and Ernst II Ludwig in these events, see Nicholas Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*, Vol. 2: *Revolution and Renunciation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 638.

²⁵ *Appeal to the Public*, pp. 92–125 (GA, I, 5, pp. 415–53).

²⁶ The Gotha Court was so intent on destroying Fichte that it even attempted to deprive him of his academic title after he was dismissed.

investigation of the issues.²⁷ After Fichte was notified of his dismissal, he debased himself by protesting to Voigt that the wording of the reprimand had not been such that he felt obliged to resign.²⁸ The delighted privy-councilor hurried to cloak Weimar's celebration of Fichte's dismissal by exposing the contrast between Fichte's present humility and prior arrogance.²⁹ At the end of the entire travesty, Goethe, with Voigt's approval, destroyed many documents regarding Fichte that the two ministers held in private.³⁰

Through the *Juridical Defense*, Fichte—ensconced in Jena, “the last refuge of free inquiry”—had wanted to “veil the [Saxon Elector's] holy head of majesty” by appealing to the Ernestine Dukes' reputation of “spiritual freedom” and thereby to engage Karl August in a reasoned discourse between equals before “conscience, the learned public, and humanity.”³¹ However, for Karl August, Goethe, and Voigt, equality only existed between contenders allied by a temporary coincidence of their interests, utilities, and powers. Political strategy rules the public pragmatic sphere, rational principle, the private and reflective. Ultimately, there is a priority of public pragmatics: Adroit rhetoric trumps rational dialogue; politics trump principles.

The Weimar Court maintained two different standards for governing the affairs of two distinct social classes. Karl August prohibited dramatic performance, which was a proper recreation for the nobility in Weimar and not for the students and professors in Jena, who would use the theatre for frivolous, and possibly subversive, public gatherings.³² Goethe allowed the ennobled mistress her pleasures, but he supported the death penalty for desperate girls who committed infanticide.³³ Voigt

²⁷ Voigt and Goethe continued to gather facts sustaining Fichte's case—including a supportive statement from Christian Erhard Schmid (1761–1812)—which their decision had already rendered irrelevant. Fichte had once declared Professor Schmid “*nonexistent as a philosopher*” (“A Comparison of Prof. Schmid's System and the *Wissenschaftslehre* [Excerpt],” EPW, pp. 316–335 [GA I, 3, pp. 255–71]). See “C. G. Voigt an Goethe” [“C. G. Voigt to Goethe”] of 6 April 1799, FG, 2, pp. 111–13, No. 798.

²⁸ On 2 April 1799, Fichte was notified by Paulus, who encouraged him to protest the dismissal (GA, III, 3, p. 373 and GA, III, 5, p. 110). The next day, Fichte wrote a letter to Voigt, which Paulus delivered (GA, III, 3, pp. 291–92).

²⁹ Nicholas Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age: Revolution and Renunciation*, p. 630.

³⁰ *Goethe: The Poet and the Age: Revolution and Renunciation*, p. 631.

³¹ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 166–68, 170–71 (GA, I, 6, pp. 39, 42, 38, and 37). “As long as some logical matter needs to be settled, sovereignty does not at all intercede, because by doing so it would endanger the *infallibility* that necessarily belongs to it. The advocates settle such a logical matter among themselves. They are completely equal to one another and do not have to defer to one another in the least” (*Juridical Defense*, pp. 170–71 [GA, I, 6, p. 42]).

³² Nicholas Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age: Revolution and Renunciation*, p. 628.

³³ See, regarding Goethe's advice to Karl August that he execute Anna Catharina Höhn for infanticide in 1783, W. D. Wilson, “Goethe, His Duke, and Infanticide: New Documents

shielded the courtier Herder from the least scrutiny while he subjected the professor Fichte to formal charges, because religious freedom belonged in the court not the classroom.³⁴ Indeed, for Karl August, Goethe, and Voigt, "enlightenment is a good thing," but it ought to be dispensed in sparing doses to "young, immature, for the most part very weak and unformed souls" and it ought not be dispensed by scholars who think they have "divine calling" to incite "the people" to protest "supposed oppressions" inflicted by the "good neighbors" on whom the state's economic and political weal depends.³⁵

In the realm of rational thought, Fichte was an indomitable champion, but in the realm of human affairs, a hapless naïf, who hoped to persuade his princely patrons with appeals to reason and right.³⁶ He was simply wrong. In the war between the friends of light and the obscurantists, "Any reconciliation, any rapprochement of the two factions, as a consequence of dialogue (not perhaps as a consequence of time) is impossible; and he who expects it is an inexperienced child."³⁷ Fichte was not alone in his naiveté. As news of his dismissal spread, other children gathered to talk, to plan, to protest. Fichte's "children," the students of the University of Jena,

and Reflections on a Controversial Execution" *German Life and Letters*, V. 61, No. 1 (2008): pp. 7–32; and see Willem Wächterhauser, *Das Verbrechen des Kindesmordes im Zeitalter Aufklärung* (Berlin: Schmidt, 1973), pp. 33–34. For discussion of this particular incident and of other conflicts between Goethe's enlightened principles and political strategies, see John R. Williams, *The Life of Goethe: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001), p. 289; and W. Daniel Wilson, "Goethe and the Political World" in *The Cambridge Companion to Goethe*, (ed.) Leslie Sharpe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 212–13. Goethe and Karl August enjoyed the favors of mistresses, ennobled by Karl August, who bore their children. Meanwhile, infanticide, usually performed by terrified girls, was a common cause of infant death and one of the most common crimes.

³⁴ Johann Gottfried (von) Herder (1744–1803), Karl August's minister of education, propounded religious views far less orthodox than Fichte's. See FSCP, p. 413. Likewise, Voigt shielded Karl August and his courtiers from any scrutiny of their foray into the nether worlds of Illuminatism while he permitted the professor Fichte to shoulder responsibility for their disastrous effort to disband the secret student "orders" (FSCP, pp. 249–61).

³⁵ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 185–86 (GA, I, 6, p. 59); "Karl August von Sachsen–Weimar–Eisenach an C. G. Voigt" ["Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach to C. G. Voigt"] of 26 December 1798, FG, 2, pp. 29–32, No. 701; and FSCP, p. 264.

³⁶ "The spirit of the purest trust blows throughout this entire written defense. They will certainly defend me against what they *can* and what they *must*. [...] They will not ignominiously dismiss me from my office and banish me. They will also not make an exception and inflict on me what in this context would be a punitive and degrading restriction of my instructional and literary freedom. They will also not allow a juridical reprimand to be issued against me; and they will do nothing that will affect my honor and good name, which I value more highly than life" (*Juridical Defense*, pp. 202–203 [GA, I, 6, pp. 81–82]).

³⁷ *Juridical Defense*, p. 184 (GA, I, 6, p. 58).

organized by Henrik Steffens, prepared a petition on Fichte's behalf, which they would present to their ruler and patron Karl August.³⁸

³⁸ Henrik Steffens (1773–1845) was a student of theology, philosophy, and natural science.

Text: "Gotha Rescript to the University of Jena"

<FG, 6.1, p. 381>

Gotha/Friedenstein, 3 April 1799

The defense demanded of Professors Fichte and Niethammer for having inserted the two essays into the *Philosophisches Journal* <382> that have caused the well-known reproach of atheism to be raised against them was already before us when we received your report from the 18th of last month on the 30th of the same.³⁹

Since we can only regretfully gather from this report that the aforementioned professors have decided to challenge the accusation made against them in a manner that does nothing but employ a newly coined scientific terminology that is unintelligible to the vast majority of readers, and since we thus gather that this defense cannot acquit them of the charge of having been not a little negligent in publishing those essays, which is to be expected from philosophy instructors least of all, we cannot avoid allowing you to reprimand them for having seen fit (and with so little caution regarding such an important topic as that of the doctrine and worship of God) to disseminate publicly principles and assertions that are liable to be interpreted and understood in the most offensive manner, as the ensuing affair suffices to show.

We expect you to disclose this, immediately after obtaining the appropriate rescripts from the other courts, not only to Professors Fichte and Niethammer but also to all the academic instructors without exception, so that in all of their lectures on the topic of divinity they will never fail to observe an appropriate discretion, the neglect of which would have the most detrimental consequences for the commonwealth as well as for themselves, since their first duty must be to ensure that the university flourishes and retains its good reputation, and that the youth who desire to teach be instructed in all of the sciences that are universally acknowledged to be useful and wholesome.⁴⁰

³⁹ On 9 January 1799, the prorector of the University of Jena, Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus (1761–1851), instructed Fichte and F. I. Niethammer to submit a written defense (FG, 5, p. 272 and GA, III, 3, p. 171). On 18 March 1799, Fichte and Niethammer sent their "Juridical Defenses" [*Der Herausgeber des Philosophischen Journals Gerichtliche Verantwortungsschriften gegen die Anklage des Atheismus*] (GA, I, 6, pp. 26–144) to the Ernestine courts—the courts of the patrons of the University of Jena—including the court of Duke Ernst II Ludwig of Saxony–Gotha–Altenburg. Presumably, Ernst II Ludwig is referring to this "demand for a defense" by Paulus and to the "report" on Fichte and Niethammer's *Juridical Defense* by the Senate of the University of Jena. The two essays in the *Philosophisches Journal* to which he refers are Fichte's ("On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," pp. 21–29 [GA, I, 5, pp. 347–57]) and Forberg's ("Development of the Concept of Religion," pp. 37–47 [SFA, pp. 37–58]).

⁴⁰ Ernst II Ludwig is referring to the responses to the *Juridical Defense* and the report from the Senate that he expects will be contained in rescripts from the other patrons of the University of Jena.

Postscriptum.

Worthy, learned and erudite ones, esteemed, devout, and faithful ones! Our cousin the Duke of Saxony-Weimar has informed us of Professor Fichte's peculiar step of having addressed an explicit declaration to a member of the privy council in which he says that if he should be reprimanded by his princely patrons on account of <384> the offensive assertions that he has published, then he will respond to such a reprimand by handing in his resignation.⁴¹

Since, as you have gathered from our chief rescript of today, we are unable to spare him the reprimand that he has earned on account of his negligence, we can only regard the hasty and extremely improper declaration that he has issued to the ducal court in Weimar as if it had also been made to us; and in view of this, in anticipated conformity with the other princely patrons, we intend hereby to have communicated through you the aforementioned professor's dismissal; and we will do no less to those who are of a mind to follow him of their own accord, as he asserted in his letter to Weimar.⁴²

⁴¹ On 22 March 1799, Fichte sent a letter to Privy-Councilor Voigt wherein he threatened to resign if reprimanded and suggested that he had supporters in the university who were prepared to resign also and to join with him in a plan to found a new institute elsewhere ("Fichte an Christian Gottlob Voigt" ["Fichte to Christian Gottlob Voigt"] of 22 March 1799, GA, III, pp. 283–86, No. 431).

⁴² Karl August had already sent his rescript of 29–31 March to the University of Jena ("Karl August von Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach: Rescript an die Universität Jena," ["Karl August of Saxony-Weimar-Eisenach: Rescript to the University of Jena"] FG, 2, pp. 90–91, No. 779) wherein he reprimanded Fichte and Niethammer and "accepted" Fichte's "resignation" by the time Ernst II Ludwig sent his rescript.

Chapter 9

Students of the University of Jena: “First Petition to Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach” *and* Karl August: “First Reply to the University of Jena” *and* Students of the University of Jena: “Second Petition to Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach” *and* Karl August: “Second Reply to the University of Jena”

Commentary

After the unclean settlement between the friends of light and the obscurantists in Jena, Fichte’s “resignation” was announced.¹ There was nothing to be done; the dismissal was final; but Fichte’s students did not give up hope so readily. On 20 April 1799, the student Hermann Baier delivered the “First Petition to Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach” to the Weimar Court.² In their missive, which was signed by 280 students, the petitioners request that Fichte—“a man whose great service to philosophy is acknowledged by every friend of truth” and “an instructor whose guidance we have been able to trust with complete confidence”—be retained at the University of Jena.³ On the same day, Karl August rejected this petition in a letter addressed to the University of Jena: “The princely courts have been persuaded to accept the proclaimed demand for the resignation

¹ See Commentary on “Gotha Rescript to the University of Jena,” pp. 207–214 (FG, 6.1, pp. 381–82 and 384, No. 792a.).

² “First Petition to Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach,” pp. 220–226 (“Studenten der Universität Jena an Karl August von Sachsen–Weimar–Eisenach” [“Students of the University of Jena to Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach”] of 20 April 1799, FG, 6.1, pp. 419–435, No. 823a.). Hermann Johann Christoph Baier (1775–1822) was a student from Swedish Pomerania.

³ “First Petition to Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach,” pp. 220–26 (FG, 6.1, pp. 419–435, No. 823a.).

of Fichte [...] the appropriate rescripts pertaining thereto have been enacted,” so please disclose this to the petitioners as they “seem not to be informed about the matter.”⁴ On 10 January 1800, the students brought their “Second Petition to Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach” to the Weimar Court requesting Fichte’s re-instatement at the University of Jena.⁵ Karl August sent a curt response to the University of Jena: Since we “cannot comply in this [request] for weighty reasons, we most graciously desire that you will make our decision known to the petitioners.”⁶

Although the intellectual and emotional connection that Fichte shared with his students is well-known, one might still ask what message regarding teaching, scholarship, and knowledge moved hundreds of students to sign two petitions on Fichte’s behalf. In between disseminating atheism and fomenting revolution, what enlightened agenda was Fichte urging in the lecture halls? When Fichte had first assumed his duties as a professor at the University of Jena in 1794, he offered a series of public lectures called “Morality for Scholars,” which addressed the role of drive in the vocation of the scholar.⁷ Perhaps these lectures best summarize the ideal of education, and of *Aufklärung* in general, that Fichte communicated to his students.

According to Fichte, a drive is an innate force, impulse, or compulsion, which becomes conscious as a feeling of yearning for unity. Fichte calls the moral law, which is felt as a basic longing for unity or consistency, man’s highest and original drive.⁸ The original drive generates other drives, including: the theoretical drive—the truth or knowledge drive—which demands knowledge or comprehension of the world; the aesthetic drive, which demands art or imagination of a different world; and the practical drive, which demands action or transformation of the

⁴ “First Reply to Students of the University of Jena,” p. 227 (“Karl August von Sachsen–Weimar–Eisenach an die Universität Jena” [“Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach to the University of Jena”] of 20 April 1799, FG, 6.1, pp. 435–436, No. 823b.). Another aborted petition was attempted on 24 April 1799 (GA, III, 3, p. 339n.).

⁵ “Second Petition to Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach,” pp. 227–31 (“Studenten der Universität Jena an Karl August von Sachsen–Weimar–Eisenach” [“Students of the University of Jena to Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach”] of 10 January 1800, FG, 6.2, pp. 498–507, No. 990b.).

⁶ “Second Reply to Students of the University of Jena,” p. 231 (“Karl August von Sachsen–Weimar–Eisenach an die Universität Jena” [“Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach to the University of Jena”] FG, 6.2, p. 507, No. 990c.).

⁷ These lectures were not preserved in entirety, but they were published in part as *Einige Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten* [Some Lectures on the Vocation of the Scholar] (Jena/Leipzig: Gabler, 1794) and are translated into English as “Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar’s Vocation” and “On Stimulating and Increasing the Pure Interest in Truth” in EPW, pp. 137–84 and 223–31 (GA, I, 3, pp. 23–90).

⁸ SE, p. 202 (GA, I, 5, pp. 194–95) and “Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar’s Vocation,” EPW, p. 149 (GA, I, 3, pp. 27–28).

world.⁹ Man's vocation is the individual approximation of internal unity or personal perfection (the cultivation and harmonization of all the individual's drives). Man's vocation within society is the communal approximation of external unity or collective perfection (the cultivation and harmonization of all human drives).¹⁰

According to Fichte, nature provides every human being with the same drives distributed in unequal measures; and experience develops those drives unevenly.¹¹ Society mitigates natural inequality by allowing individuals to receive an education, whereby personal strengths are cultivated and weaknesses, remedied, and to choose a class, whereby individuals communicate the benefits of their education to others. After enjoying an education specifically designed to stimulate and cultivate the truth drive, the scholar must stimulate this drive in others and communicate the knowledge necessary for pursuing man's vocation within society. The scholar must seek, disseminate, and love truth, serving as an archive and repository of knowledge.¹² As a teacher, the scholar must strive to awaken man's sense for truth; as an educator, to ensure that society advances.¹³ As a social leader, the scholar must serve as an exemplar of cultural and ethical development. In order to accomplish these tasks, the scholar must possess the highest social skill, the ability to communicate, the highest scholarly virtue, the love of truth, and the highest human capacity, spirit.¹⁴

Fichte describes spirit as the human capacity to raise feelings to consciousness as ideas. It is man's birthright; but since nature is capricious, some of her children move with greater ease than others in the realm of ideas. The spirit-filled apply their comparatively greater resources to the deeper feelings related to their rational sensitivities, thereby generating the ideals that regulate all theoretical and practical activity. Such ideals include beauty, delight, sublimity, divinity, and truth. The scholar must communicate these ideals to others, but since the spiritual ideal cannot be transferred directly from mind to mind, it must be presented through a body, or physical form, of symbols, sounds, shapes, textures, and colors. Theoretical knowledge in general, and philosophical knowledge in particular, involves raising fundamental feelings (universal activities of spirit) to consciousness as ideas

⁹ SE, pp. 137–38 (GA, I, 5, pp. 136–37) and “On Stimulating and Increasing the Pure Interest in Truth,” EPW, p. 224 (GA, I, 3, p. 83).

¹⁰ “Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar's Vocation,” EPW, pp. 149–50 (GA, I, 3, pp. 30–33) and SE, p. 152 (GA, I, 5, pp. 150–51).

¹¹ These inequities differentiate human beings as individuals possessing diverse interests and capacities. They are part of the incomprehensible limits by virtue of which each human being discovers his unique duties (“On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World Governance,” pp. 26–27 [GA, I, 5, pp. 354–55]).

¹² SE, pp. 327–28 (GA, I, 5, pp. 302–303).

¹³ “Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar's Vocation,” EPW, p. 175 (GA, I, 3, pp. 57–58).

¹⁴ “Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar's Vocation,” EPW, pp. 173–74 (GA, I, 3, pp. 54–56) and SE, p. 328 (GA, I, 5, p. 302).

(universal laws of thought) by means of abstraction and reflection and integrating them within a system. Knowledge, and philosophical knowledge especially, is only possible if we are already acquainted with these universal activities and laws through a feeling, or presentiment, of the truth. Spirit elevates this feeling to consciousness, developing it as a drive and a sense for truth. Likewise, spirit urges us to follow this sense and to establish it as a love of truth, which wills to discover truth regardless of its cost.

Fichte believes no teacher can give students knowledge—no educator can give society wisdom—but scholars can stimulate and cultivate the pure interest in truth within their students and society. The truth drive is stimulated by eliminating forces that diminish it and providing pleasures that strengthen it. It becomes a pure interest in truth through freely chosen, repeated pleasurable experience of mental exertion and internal consistency.¹⁵ This interest is diminished by vanity, cowardice, and laziness, which flourish whenever human freedom is threatened by despotism.¹⁶ All forms of despotism encourage passivity and weakness, thereby discouraging and undermining free, independent activity of the heart, mind, and soul.¹⁷ The intellectual result of despotism is literalism, or conflating the body and the spirit of ideas. Literalism thwarts communication by discouraging the free effort and participation of the communicators. Insofar as communication is the only means by which knowledge and culture may be transmitted between the classes and the generations, non-communication undermines cultural development and produces depravity, or the hope of becoming wise, virtuous, and happy without mental, moral, or social exertion.¹⁸

Fichte says that the scholar must fight despotism, literalism, and depravity within society. Although countering these forces exceeds the strength of an individual, or perhaps of an entire class, the scholar never labors in vain provided that the dictate to love and seek the truth is honored. An individual scholar may only ignite a passion for truth in a few kindred spirits, and within a single generation, individual scholars will perish, perhaps in obscurity, but no number of generations—however mindless or soulless—can eclipse the light of truth. The scholar must say: “My labors will help determine the course of future generations and the history of nations still to come. I am called to testify to the truth. My life and destiny do not matter at all, but infinitely much depends upon the results of my

¹⁵ “On Stimulating and Increasing the Pure Interest in Truth,” EPW, p. 223 (GA, I, 3, p. 83).

¹⁶ “On Stimulating and Increasing the Pure Interest in Truth,” EPW, p. 225 (GA, I, 3, pp. 84–85).

¹⁷ VM, p. 113 (GA, I, 6, p. 298).

¹⁸ “On Stimulating and Increasing the Pure Interest in Truth,” EPW, pp. 226–27 (GA, I, 3, pp. 85–87).

life. I am a priest of truth. I am in its pay, and thus I have committed myself to do, to risk, and to suffer anything for its sake.”¹⁹

If this was the vocation of the scholar, it would seem that Fichte—who did, risked, and suffered much for truth—fulfilled it. Moreover, gazing over the names standing beneath the student petitions, one knows he ignited the passion for truth in many a young and kindred spirit. In Fichte’s *Juridical Defense*, shortly before his dismissal, he had warned that if the friends of light attempted to compromise with the obscurantists at the University of Jena, it would “sink into the same obscurity and be swallowed up by the same evil reputation with which certain other universities are covered and (which, given its situation, must follow from the preceding) be completely destroyed.”²⁰ Although the University of Jena was certainly not “completely destroyed” by the atheism dispute, in the coming years—after Fichte “the soul of Jena” departed—the other luminous faculty dispersed, the spirited students disappeared, and the glorious community that was Jena declined.²¹ January of 1800 would find Fichte preparing to publish a new presentation of his philosophy, *The Vocation of Man*, and writing “A Private Letter” about the atheism dispute.²²

¹⁹ “Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar’s Vocation,” EPW, p. 176 (GA, I, 3, p. 58).

²⁰ *Juridical Defense*, pp. 183–84 (GA, I, 6, p. 57)

²¹ On this subject, see Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 105 and 111; and see Nicholas Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*, Vol. 2: *Revolution and Renunciation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 625–31.

²² VM (GA, I, 6, pp. 181–309) and “From a Private Letter,” pp. 252–67 (GA, I, 6, pp. 369–89).

Text: “First Petition to Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach”

<FG, 6.1, p. 419>

Jena, 20 April 1799

The University of Jena owes the greater part of its flourishing renown and well-being to Your Highness’s most gracious patronage and fatherly care. Because of Your Highness’s own active zeal in support of the genuine education and refinement of those who are studying here, the university obtains instructors who must soon be the envy of the most famous schools. Professor Fichte, a man whose great service to philosophy is acknowledged by every friend of truth, and who will one day be the pride of our century, has very much added to the splendor of the university to which he was called. We all honor and love in him an instructor whose guidance we have been able to trust with complete confidence. In recent days this instructor’s widespread fame has drawn a considerable number of students from the most distant regions of Germany to Jena, and his lectures that are promised for the next half year in the course catalog alone have made many of us decide to remain here.

There is a rumor in wide circulation that Professor Fichte’s dismissal has been decreed, which makes us fear that we will lose him.²³ For us, however, his loss would be irreplaceable. In such an event our certain hope of further tuition from this instructor, as contained in the promises made to us publicly in the course catalog, would be disappointed; we would lose with him one of our chief purposes for being here.

The entire school will thus suffer from his departure; and, for us in particular, everything depends on this man’s remaining here. We humbly request, with unshakeable confidence in Your Highness’s most gracious patronage, that we be assured that this valued instructor will be retained and that he will be charged with continuing his lectures in the next half year, because our course schedule has been worked out on precisely such an assumption. We will show our appreciation of the granting of our request by offering our most sincere gratitude and will recognize in it an admirable sign of your princely favor and fatherly care. We remain, with sincerest loyalty and innermost reverence, <420> Your Highness’s most humble subjects.

G. F. Balser from Darmstadt

G. v. d. Lanken from Swed. Pomerania

G. C. Odebrecht from Swed. Pomerania

C. Hoefer from Swed. Pomerania

v. Bostell from Wetzlar

L. Otth from Switzerland

²³ Karl August sent a rescript of 29–31 March 1799 to the University of Jena wherein he reprimanded Fichte and Niethammer for negligence (FG, 2, pp. 90–91). This rescript was accompanied by a postscript “accepting” Fichte’s “resignation.”

C. Schütz from Magdeburg
C. Ph. S. Schellenberg from Lahr in Breisgau
F. Lautz from Usingen
L. Rollwagen from Braunfelsischen
C. v. Bohlen from Swedish-Pomerania
K. Dresler from Nassau
T. Schwarz of the Rügen Island
L. C. Treviranus from Bremen
J. T. Kraus from Siebenbürgen
Sam. Bodo from Hungary
Sam. Sztaritskay from Hungary
Andr. Wengeritzky from Hungary
M. Schwarz, Hung.
C. Lange from Idstein
H. Karcher from Saarbrücken
J. E. Jordan from Swedish Pomerania
J. F. Dahlmann from Wismar
Aug. Schröder from Swedish Pomerania
Paul Császári from Hungary
Christian Wüstinger from Hungary
Anton v. Pazmanday from Hungary
Christianus Tremmel from Hungary
Michael Heckenast from Hungary
Johannes Holndonner, Hungary
Samuel Ambrosy, Hungarus
Johann Tellmann, Transylv.
Matthias Liptay from Hungary
Daniel Záborszky from Hungary
Johann Roiko from Hungary
Daniel Kriebel from Hungary
Mich. Theil, Hung.
Jacob Krieg, Hung.
Joseph Kalchbrenner from Hungary
Georg Capesius, Transl.
Andr. Madarasz, Hungary
Geogius Koritary, Hungary
Michael Boszi, Hungary
Joannes Szigesky, Hungary
Johann Hirling from Siebenbürgen
Joh. Peter Schuster, Transylv.
Steph. Eitel from Siebenbürgen
A. Daniel Capesius from Siebenbürgen
G. Auner from Siebenbürgen
J. Bergleiter from Siebenbürgen

J. Czerbes from Siebenbürgen
 Th. Czay from Siebenbürgen
 M. Gottl. Roth from Siebenbürgen
 Andr. Dendler from Siebenbürgen
 Sam. Wolff, Transylv.
 <P>. M. B. Zahn from Nürnberg
 Mart. Tray. Fellmer, Transylv.
 Sam. Theil, Siebenbürgen
 M. Helmrich from Mannheim
 J. Weilburg from Limburg
 J. Ording from the Bishopric of Hildesheim
 C. Keller from Zweibrücken
 L. Siegel from Zweibrücken
 C. H. Hiecke from Elect. Saxony
 J. L. H. Burkhardt from the Shire of Castell
 H. Chr. Göring from the Principality of Eisenach
 A. Fr. Heller from Swedish-Pomerania
 J. B. Vermehren from Lübeck
 B. H. Frister from Lübeck
 J. C. Frank from Stralsund in Swedish Pomerania
 N. Zetternau Holmia-Suecus
 F. H. Martens from Swedish-Pomerania
 G. Krüger from Mecklenburg-Schwerin
 H. C. Gerzimski from Courland
 G. Chr. Friedr. Schottin from the Duchy of Weimar
 C. G. Römheld from Duchy of Fulda
 A. L. Wolff from Bonn am Rhein
 Knopff from the Electorate of Hannover
 G. Ph. E. Moser from the Bishopric of Würzburg
 Hoffmann from the Principality of Ysenburg
 Werren from Mainz
 Kaufmann from Bonn
 C. F. Geiger from Nassau-Weilburg
 G. Friederich from Frankfurt a/M.
 C. v. Bremen from the Duchy of Bremen
 Ph. Karcher from the Countship of Nassau-Sarbrück
 A. Jacobi from Hannover
 Kestner from Hannover
 Heise from Celle
 Büser from Wetzlar
 Krauß from Franconia
 Hübbe from the Electorate of Hannover
 Autenrieth from KarlsRuh.
 Zandt from KarlsRuh.

Frey from Helvetia
Gredig from Rhaetia
Lehmus from Rothenburg in Franconia
Zucker from Regensburg
Kraft from the Upper Palatinate
Friederich Augustiny from Brodersbey in Ducal Schleswig
J. G. A. von Brokes from Lübeck
Villepaille from Wismar
Hundhausen Westphalian Mountains
Kleine from Westphalia
Moes from Westphalia
F. Hindrichs from Westphalia
F. A. Bach from Eutin in Holstein
Ostermayer from Lübeck
B. v. Besserer from Ulm
Schroeder from Mecklenburg
Oesten from Mecklenburg
Marggraf from Meklenburg
Gerschov from Meklenburg
F. Wendland from Mecklenburg-Strelitz
F. Korb from Mecklenburg-Strelitz
H. Walther from Meklenburg-Strelitz
D. Kortüm from Meklenburg-Strelitz
E. Dupré from Saarbrück.
M. Kubli from Helvetia
C. Groß from Helvetia
Rothplaz from Helvetia
L. Tscharnier from Helvetia
J. F. Werdt from Helvetia
Kottmann from Helvetia
H. Hofer from Helvetia
U. Brenner from Helvetia
D. Bernhard from Rhaetia
P. Paulsen
Harbaur
J. G. Lange
D. Iseemann from Zweibrücken
J. B. Urich from Erbach
B. D. Eglinger from the Rhein and Mosel Province
A. H. d'Autel from Heilbron
C. Ellemann from Bamberg
J. L. Fritsch from Zweibrücken
Ch. M. Roth from Heilbronn am Neckar
J. C. Pfeiffer of the Rhein & Mosel Province

L. Neßler from Korb
 J. M. Groß from the Palatinate
 Fr. Rütz from Swed. Pomerania
 L. F. Ch. Weber II from the Prov. of Donnersberg
 S. G. Scheffler from Danzig
 Ch. Kalbfus from the Prov. of Donnersberg
 J. Mathias. R...nus.
 G. Horn from Hadamar
 L. Pelzer from the Province of Trier
 Neßler S.
 Schweikert from the Shire of Erbach
 W. F. Windt from Diez an der Lahn
 L. F. Jonas from Frankfurt a/M.
 J. G. Falck from Frankfurt a. M.
 H. F. Achenbach from Siegen in the Principality of Nassau
 C. G. Weber I from the Former Palatinate
 C. F. Hincke fr. Mecklenburg Schwerin
 C. Mayer from Kaufbeuren in Upper Swabia
 F. H. Schumann from Neuwied am Rhein
 Ferd. Zembsch from Magdeburg
 D. R. Wullen from Silesia
 Zander from Mekl. Strel.
 N. Johannsen from Holstein
 M. Marcus from Altona
 Salchow from Meklenburg
 D. v. Bülow from Meklenburg-Schwerin
 A. Stoerzel from Mecklenburg
 M. Holm from Meklenburg
 Schick from Wezlar
 F. G. Mussäus from Meklenburg-Schwerin
 C. A. Clausnizer from Hohenlohe
 G. Thumsener from Bremen
 J. Lütgens from Bremen
 J. J. Stolz from Bremen
 A. Gust. Achgelis from the Duchy of Oldenburg
 E. Buren Westphalian Mountains
 E. B. Polemann from the Duchy of Bremen
 G. Segelken from Bremen
 Th. Mellmann from Dortmund in Westphalia
 Friederich Augustiny from Ducal Schleswig
 G. E. H. Busse from the Electorate of Hannover
 W. Nies from Dortmund in Westphalia
 H. Meyer from Oldenburg in Westphalia
 C. A. G. Schlemm from Halberstadt

A. Schmemmann from Dortmund in Westphalia
Wolf from the Duchy of Bremen
W. Böing from Limburg in Westphalia
A. Hatteisen from Westphalia
J. G. Reese from the Duchy of Oldenburg
R. W. Hormann from the Electorate of Hannover
M. v. Fürstenwaerther from Westphalia
G. Beurhaus from Westphalia
Carl May from Franconia
Ph. Georgii from Franconia
J. Arnold Kanne from Detmold
H. F. L. v. Langwerth from the Shire of Hoya in Westphalia
S. Delius from the Duchy of Bremen
J. G. Arens from Oldenburg in Westphalia
A. M. Claussen from Oldenburg in Westphalia
E. W. Baars from Oldenburg in Westphalia
Georg Heinrich Keyser from Regensburg
Chr. G. Thamert <Thannert> from Sonderhausen
A. W. Gimmerthal from the Principality of Schwarzburg Sonderhausen
A. W. Muscate from the Principality of Schwarzburg Sonderhausen
J. G. Fr. Siemer from Electoral Saxony
J. G. Gellert from Electoral Saxony
G. G. J. Weidner from Regensburg
J. H. L. Lorenz from the same place
Gottl. Schäffer same
Chr. Aug. Burckhardt from Langensalza
Aug. Falkner from Schwarzb. Sonderhausen
W. Goetze from the Electorate of Hannover
F. G. Gräter from Swabia
J. G. Lunz from Swabia
W. Seiler from Swabia
J. C. Röslen from Swabia
A. Merckle from Swabia
M. C. Haßler from Ulm an d. Donau
N. U. Schreiber from the Imperial City of Ulm
J. M. Abt from Ulm in Swabia
J. D. Haug Ulman
L. F. Hezel from Halle in Swabia
J. F. Röhler from Halle in Swabia
H. C. Hagenmayer from Ulm
Fr. Niethammer, Wirtemberg
J. G. A v. Baldinger, Ulmanus
C. A. G. Pfeiffer of Rothenburg an der Tauber
J. C. Merz Rothenburg an der Tauber

C. D. Albrecht from Rothenburg ob der Tauber
 J. F. F. Rittmann from Hall in Swabia
 J. G. W. Hochstetter from Windsheim in Franconia
 S. Kienlen of Ulm
 R. H. Knittel from Oettingen Wallerstein
 A. F. Meyer from Ulm in Swabia
 J. L. Bäßler from Swabia
 J. Rehm from Swabia
 H. Steffens Dr. from Norway
 W. Vey from Meiningen
 F. Hartung from Hohenlohe
 Ch. T. Hoelbe from the Principality of Henneberg
 J. C. Grunert from the Duchy of Altenburg
 C. F. Dinzsich from Electoral Saxony
 J. G. Schmid from Thuringia
 C. C. Zellmann from Eisenach
 V. Anschel from Bonn am Rhein
 W. Seelig from Böhmen
 C. Sillich of Fichtelgebirg
 E. C. A. Schönauf from Gotha
 M. C. Möller Dr. from Denmark
 J. H. Alberti from the Duchy of Oldenburg in Westphalia
 F. Horn from Braunschweig
 E. Bartels from Braunschweig
 S. P. C. Rahtgen from Altona
 A. S. Möller from Holstein
 A. M. Karstens from Holstein
 E. G. Werlin from Holstein
 S. F. Vollitz from Hanover
 C. Salfeld from Hanover
 J. E. Noltenius from Bremen
 J. D. Noltenius from Bremen
 J. Zahn from Bremen
 F. C. Schweikart from the Shire of Erbach[†]

Text: “First Reply to the University of Jena”

<FG, 6.1, p. 435>

Weimar, 20 April 1799

Since, as you already know, the princely courts have been persuaded to accept the proclaimed <436> demand for the resignation of Fichte, a professor at your institution, and since the appropriate rescripts pertaining thereto have been enacted, we regret that we are not able to fulfill the wishes (as revealed in the original document) of the petitioners interceding on behalf of the aforementioned professor, who seem not to be informed about the matter; and we therefore most graciously desire that you will disclose this to the one who delivered the petition, i.e., the student Hermann Baier from Swedish Pomerania, by informing him of the necessary particulars.²⁴

Text: “Second Petition to Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach”

<FG, 6.2, p. 498>

10 January 1800

It has not yet pleased the most illustrious patrons of the University of Jena to allow the position that was vacated by the dismissal of former Professor Fichte to be occupied again.²⁵

Since a substantial gap has thereby been created that interferes with the satisfaction of our scholarly needs in a manner appropriate to the spirit to which philosophy has risen in our age, it is to be anticipated that these most illustrious patrons will provide for the weal of the Jena academy by making an attempt to fill this gap once again.

But no guide to what we seek, i.e., the truth, enjoys to such a high degree the confidence and devotion of the students as Fichte; no one but Fichte can fulfill our wishes in such a completely satisfactory manner and in a way that scales the heights upon which philosophy now stands. Therefore, it is the universal wish of

²⁴ Hermann Johann Christoph Baier (1775–1822) delivered the “original document,” the “First Petition to Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach,” pp. 220–26 (FG, 6.1, pp. 419–427, No. 823a.). Karl August means that the students seem to be ignorant of the “particulars” that Fichte has already been dismissed or “resigned.”

²⁵ The students mean Karl August (1757–1828), Duke of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach in particular, but also the other “illustrious patrons of the University,” the Ernestine Dukes. The “dismissal” to which the students refer is the rescript of 29–31 March 1799 sent by Duke Karl August to the University of Jena wherein he reprimanded Fichte and Niethammer for negligence, which was accompanied by a postscript “accepting” Fichte’s “resignation” (FG, 2, pp. 90–91). Karl August had sent confirmation of Fichte’s dismissal to the students in his reply of 20 April 1799 (“First Reply to the University of Jena,” p. 227 [FG, 6.1, pp. 435–36, No. 823b.]).

the students here that they be allowed to be able to work once again under Fichte's direction in order to satisfy their purpose for being here.

In view of our universal wish, we venture, Your Highness, to present our most humble request that former Professor <499> Fichte be re-appointed to a position in philosophy.

The patronage that Your Highness has bestowed on the sciences, the promotion of which has offered us here, in every other respect, such excellent and diverse opportunities for our scientific education, justifies our hope that it will please Your Highness to grant this most humble request. With this most humble request we remain, with innermost reverence, Your Highness's most humble subjects.

G. F. W. Balser from Darmstadt
 W. B. Rollwagen from Hungary
 Herm. Baier of the Island of Rügen
 Carl Burgold from Gotha
 L. Fritsch from Zweibrücken
 L. Keller from Zweibrücken
 L. Siegel from Zweibrücken
 L. König from Zweibrücken
 C. Köster from Zweibrücken
 C. Danneberg from Clausthal
 H. J. Kopp from Hessen
 L. C. Treviranus from Bremen
 C. Dupré from the Fränk Republic
 G. Eberlein from Heilbronn
 K. A. Schweikart from Erbach
 H. Lorenz from Regensburg
 J. Weidner from Regensburg
 K. von Selpert from Regensburg
 [F. Posfeldt] from Carlsruhe
 J. Zandt from Carlsruhe
 Fr. Seyffer from Cannstadt
 G. Meßner from Mergentheim
 F. Graeter from Swabia
 Mich. Rehm from Memmingen
 Wilh. Seiler from Ötting.-Wallerst.
 El. Merckle from Swabia
 B. von Beßerer from Swabia
 G. Lunz from Kempten
 C. Majer from Swabia
 J. E. Rittmann from Swabia
 L. Bäßler from Memmingen
 W. Englert from Schweinfurth
 C. Hagemayer from Ulm

Tob. Ott from Schwabach
H. Hardege from Wernigerode
A. Winkelmann from Braunschweig
H. Lichtenstein from Hamburg
J. C. Varrentrapp from Frankfurt a. M.
J. K. Dresler from Herborn
F. C. Schweikart from Erbach
W. Lange from Idstein
N. Helmrich from Wöhrheim
W. Berlin from Mecklenburg
C. Rodbertus from Swed. Pomerania
H. Walther from Mecklenburg
[F.] Wendland from Meckl.-Strelitz
F. Korb from Meckl.-Strelitz
F. Erdtmann from Meckl.-Strelitz
[T.] Kestner from Hannover
C. Heyer from Braunschweig
F. Horn from Braunschweig
L. Preußner from Dillenburg
A. v. Sachs from Wetzlar
F. Gildemeister from Bremen
C. Weber from the Palatinate
F. Bergsträßer from Hanau
C. Roth from Siebenbürgen
St. Eitel from Siebenbürgen
M. Felmer from Siebenbürgen
G. Paul from Siebenbürgen
J. Czerbes from Siebenbürgen
C. Weber from the Palatinate
G. Bogen from Frankfurt a. M.
[D.] Salchow from Meckl.-Schwerin
W. Büser from Wetzlar
V. Anschel from Bonn
W. Hübbe from the Electorate of Hannover
M. Marcus from Holstein
S. Petersen from Holstein
L. Kranztz from Meckl.-Strelitz
Gorden from Mecklenburg
L. Oesten from Mecklenburg
F. Zander from Mecklenburg
F. Marggraf from Meckl.-Strelitz
H. Hiecke from Electoral Saxony
F. Ritschl. from Erfurth
E. Voigt from Erfurth

J. Fritzsche from Dresden
 C. Hohnbaum from Coburg
 L. Wrangel from Ehstland
 C. Brentano from Frankfurt a. M.
 Koch from Friedberg
 A. Diehls from Hanau
 F. Geiger from Nassau Weilb.
 C. Boekh from Carlsruh.
 W. Stieda from the Principality of Schwarzburg
 W. Gebhard from Baaden
 L. Coll. from Coburg
 F. v. Liebenstein from Baaden
 F. Roloffs from Holstein
 H. Behrmann from Holstein
 W. Warnstedt from Schleswig
 E. Volckers from Schlesw.-Hollstein
 G. Werlin from Holstein
 F. Pollitz from Holstein
 [F.] Augustiny from Denmark
 P. Friedrichsen from Holstein
 F. Sternhagen from Holstein
 W. Bartels from Holstein
 H. Burkhardt from Franconia
 G. Pfeiffer from Franconia
 L. Lehmus from Franconia
 C. Merz from Franconia
 H. Brenner from Schweinfurth.
 F. Bauer from Hohenlohe
 G. Albrecht from Franconia
 G. Krauß from Franconia
 E. Moser from Franconia
 F. Trautwein from Franconia
 K. Merlet from Fürstenberg
 V. Hoyer from Baaden
 E. Eißfeld from the Duchy of Braunschweig
 H. Roth from the Margraviate of Baaden
 G. Düring from Mainz
 J. Ellmann from Bamberg
 Bernstein from Ilmenau
 G. Mußäus from the Duchy of Mecklenburg
 M. Koehler from Heppenheim
 Horst from Cölln [Cologne] am Rhein
 F. Wirthmann from the Principality of Anspach [Ansbach]
 E. Grünninger from the Landgraviate of Hesse

W. Hochstetter from Windsheim
C. Clausnizer from Hohenlohe
C. Albrecht from Franconia
W. Georgii from Hildburghausen
H. Göbel from Franconia
A. Koch from Hessen
Ch. Collmann from Hessen
H. Kleibert from Schweinfurth
F. Schmidt from the Frankish Republic
Chr. Ringer from Franconia
C. Müller from Mühlhausen
J. A. Diemer from Elwangen
W. Götze from the Land Hadelen [Hadeln]
G. Gellert from Electoral Saxony
G. Falkner from Schwarzburg
C. Rippel from Meiningen
A. Bader from Mühlhausen
F. Schlitz from Hohenlohe
A. Haynich from the Duchy of Altenburg
T. Schwarz from the Island of Rügen[†]

Text: “Second Reply to the University of Jena”

<FG, 6.2, p. 507>

Weimar, 10 January 1800

According to the content of the transcribed document, the student Balser and his associates have petitioned for Fichte, the former Professor of Philosophy, to be appointed to a position in philosophy somewhere within your institution.²⁶

Since, however, we for our part cannot comply in this for weighty reasons, we most graciously desire that you will make our decision known to the petitioners.

²⁶ Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Balser (1780–1846) was a student from Darmstadt.

Endnotes

†

Information about the signatories follows in alphabetical order:

- Abt, Johann Martin (matriculated 22 April 1796)
 Achenbach, Heinrich Friedrich (matriculated 22 October 1798)
 Achgelis, Abraham Gustav (matriculated 17 October 1797)
 Alberti, Johann Heinrich (matriculated 6 May 1797)
 Albrecht, Christian Daniel (matriculated 19 October 1798)
 Ambrosy, Samuel (matriculated 31 October 1798)
 Anschel, Voss (matriculated 14 June 1798)
 Arens, Johann Georg (matriculated 17 April 1799)
 Augustiny [Augustini], Friederich [signed twice] (1778–1852; matriculated 21 April 1799; became an Evangelical religious leader)
 Auner, Gottlieb (matriculated 30 September 1798)
 Autenrieth, Karl (matriculated 4 May 1797)
 Baars, Ernst Wilhelm (1780–1837; matriculated 12 April 1799; became an Evangelical religious leader in Oldenburg)
 Bach, Friedrich August (matriculated 6 May 1797)
 Baier, Hermann Johann Christoph (1775–1822; matriculated 23 October 1797; became a pastor at the Altenkirchen in Rügen)
 Baldinger [von], Irenäus Germanus Anton (matriculated 1 May 1798)
 Balser, Georg Friedrich Wilhelm (1780–1846; matriculated 23 October 1797; became a doctor of medicine, and later a professor of medicine, in Göttingen)
 Bartels, Ernst Daniel August (1774[or 78]–1838; matriculated 31 October 1798; became a professor of medicine in Helmstedt, Erlangen, Marburg, Breslau, and Berlin)
 Bäßler, Johann Leonard (matriculated 1 May 1798)
 Bergleiter, Johann (1774–1843; matriculated 30 September 1798; became a lecturer and a rector at a *Gymnasium* in Hermannstadt)
 Bernhard, Andreas (1769–1854; matriculated 28 October 1797; became a doctor of medicine, and later, a medical practitioner in Hannover and Switzerland)
 Besserer [von], Benedikt [-Thalfingen] (matriculated 24 April 1799)
 Beurhaus, Gottlieb Friedrich (matriculated 11 April 1799)
 Bodo, Samuel (matriculated 14 October 1799)
 Bohlen [von], Karl (matriculated 10 October 1797)
 Böing, Wilhelm (matriculated 11 April 1799)
 Bostell [von], Johann Christian (matriculated 12 May 1797)
 Boszi, Michael (matriculated 18 April 1799)
 Bremen [von], Johann August Karl (matriculated 8 May 1798)
 Brenner, Johann Ulrich (matriculated 23 October 1798)
 Brokes [Brockes] [von], Johann Georg Arnold (died 1825; matriculated 9 May 1797; became a jurist and a canon in Lübeck)

- Bülow [von], Detlev Christian (matriculated 22 October 1798)
Burckhardt, Christian August (matriculated 27 May 1796)
Buren [Büren], Ernst (matriculated 4 May 1797)
Burkhardt, Johann Lorenz Heinrich (matriculated 1 May 1798)
Büser [Büßer], Wilhelm (matriculated 14 October 1797)
Busse, Georg Ernst Heinrich (1780–1838; matriculated 26 April 1798; became a pastor near Lübeck)
Capesius, A. Daniel (matriculated 30 September 1798)
Capesius, Georg (matriculated 30 September 1798)
Clausnizer, Christoph August (matriculated 19 October 1798)
Claussen, Anton Martin (matriculated 12 April 1799)
Császári, Paul (matriculated 23 April 1798)
Czay [Zay], Martin Gottlieb (matriculated 30 September 1798)
Czerbes, Johann (matriculated 2 May 1798)
d' Autel [Dautel], August Heinrich (1779–1835; matriculated 8 May 1797; became High Court Preacher in Stuttgart)
Dahlmann, Johann Christ. Friedrich (1780–1829; matriculated 17 April 1799; became a jurist and a city clerk in Wismar)
Delius, Samuel Peter (matriculated 8 May 1797)
Dendler, Georg Andreas (1776–1849; matriculated 30 September 1798; became a teacher and a parson in Siebenbürger)
Dinzsch, Christian Friedrich (matriculated 12 April 1797)
Dresler, Johann Karl Jakob (matriculated 1 May 1798)
Dupré, Elias (matriculated 14 May 1798)
Eglinger, Bernhard David (matriculated 20 April 1797)
Eitel, Stephan (matriculated 30 September 1798)
Elleman, Karl (matriculated 22 October 1798)
Falck, Johann Georg (matriculated 31 October 1798)
Falkner, Johann August Gottfried (matriculated 11 May 1797)
Felmer, Martin Tray. (matriculated 2 May 1798)
Frank, Johann Caspar (matriculated 11 April 1799)
Frey, Jacob (matriculated 27 April 1797)
Friederich, Gerhard (1779–1862; matriculated 10 October 1797; became City-Preacher and a writer)
Frister, Bernhard Heinrich (matriculated 9 May 1797)
Fritsch, Johann Ludwig (matriculated 17 April 1799)
Fürstenwaerther [von], Moritz (matriculated 11 April 1799; became an explorer in North America)
Geiger, Karl Friedrich (matriculated 12 May 1797)
Gellert, Johann Georg (matriculated 15 May 1797 [possibly J. F. Gellert, born in 1781 in Niederfriedersdorf, Oberlausitz, a preacher in Liebenau])
Georgii, Phillip (matriculated 13 October 1798)
Gerschov, Ludwig Detlev (matriculated 24 October 1795)
Gerzimski, Adoph H. C. (matriculated 5 June 1795)

- Gimmerthal, August Johann Christian Wilhelm (1774–1840; matriculated 25 April 1796; became a household tutor and a rector of a *Gymnasium* in Sonderhausen)
- Goetze, Christoph Wilhelm (died 1826; matriculated 25 October 1797; became a doctor of philosophy and a rector in Otterndorf)
- Göring, Heinrich Christian (matriculated 16 May 1797)
- Gräter, Franz Gottlieb Friedrich (matriculated 28 April 1797)
- Gredig, Laurent (matriculated 10 October 1797)
- Groß, Karl Ludwig (matriculated 5 December 1798)
- Groß, Johann Matthias (died 1828; matriculated 23 October 1798; became an Evangelical preacher in Stadtecken, Rheinhessen)
- Grunert, Johann Karl (matriculated 22 April 1788)
- Hagenmayer, Heinrich Christian (matriculated 31 October 1798)
- Harbaur, Franz Joseph (matriculated 1 September 1796)
- Hartung, Friedrich (matriculated 19 October 1797)
- Haßler, Markus Ulrich (matriculated 8 May 1797)
- Hatteisen, August Wilhelm (matriculated 31 October 1798)
- Haug, Johann David (matriculated 1 May 1798)
- Heckenast, Michael (matriculated 13 October 1796)
- Heise, Eberhard Gottlieb Georg (matriculated 9 May 1798)
- Heller, August Friedrich (matriculated 21 April 1799)
- Helmrich, M. [The register lists only a Friedrich Helmrich from Nassau, matriculated 19 October 1798.]
- Hezel, Lorenz Friedrich (matriculated 19 October 1797; became a lawyer in Schwäbisch Hall)
- Hiecke, Christian Heinrich (died 1811/12; matriculated 23 October 1798)
- Hincke, Karl Friedrich (1774–1829; matriculated 23 May 1798; became a doctor of medicine and later a practitioner in Tessin)
- Hindrichs, Johann Friedrich (matriculated 11 April 1799)
- Hirling, Johann (30 September 1798)
- Hochstetter, Johann Georg Wilhelm (matriculated 17 April 1799)
- Hofer, Karl Andreas [Not listed in register.]
- Hoelbe, Christian Friedrich Theodor (matriculated 4 May 1797)
- Hofer, Heinrich (matriculated 10 October 1797)
- Hoffmann, Georg Friedrich (matriculated 15 May 1797)
- Holm, Moritz Ludwig (matriculated 10 October 1797; became a lawyer, treasury clerk, and privy councillor in Schwerin)
- Holdonner, Johannes (matriculated 19 October 1798)
- Hormann, Rudolf Wilhelm (12 April 1799)
- Horn, Ferdinand (matriculated 1 May 1798)
- Horn, Georg (1773–1840; matriculated 28 October 1795; became a gymnasium professor in Hadamar and then, a *Privatdozent* in Jena; also a lawyer)
- Hübbe, Herrmann Philipp Nikolaus (matriculated 17 October 1797)

- Hundhausen, Johann Wilhelm (matriculated 26 April 1798 [possibly Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Hundhausen, 1777–1829, a doctor of medicine and a practitioner in Ritzebüttel])
- Isemann, Daniel (matriculated 23 October 1798)
- Jacobi, Albrecht Friedrich (matriculated 2 May 1798)
- Johannsen, Nikolaus (1778–1816; matriculated 23 October 1797; became a medical practitioner in Flensburg)
- Jonas, Laurentius Franz (matriculated 1 May 1798)
- Jordan, Joachim Ernst (matriculated 9 May 1797)
- Kalbfus, Johann Christian (matriculated 16 April 1798)
- Kalchbrenner, Joseph (matriculated 19 October 1798)
- Kanne, Johann Arnold (1773–1824; became a professor in Nürnberg)
- Karcher, H. [The register contained only Philipp Karcher (from the Principality of Nassau-Sarbrücken), matriculated 10 October 1797.]
- Karstens, Adolph Matthias (1777–1840; matriculated 19 October 1798)
- Kaufmann, W. Salomon (1773–1832; matriculated 23 October 1797; became a medical practitioner in Hamm)
- Keller, C.
- Kestner, Theodor Friedrich Arnold (1778–1847; matriculated 31 October 1798; became Professor and a medical practitioner in Frankfurt am Main)
- Keyser [Kayser], Georg Heinrich (1798–1819; matriculated 30 September 1798; became a lawyer in Sulzbach, *Gymnasium* professor in München and Augsburg)
- Kienlen, Septimus (matriculated 8 May 1797)
- Kleine, Wilhelm K. (matriculated 25 October 1796)
- Knittel, R. H. [The register contained only Johann Friedrich Knittel, matriculated 1 May 1798.]
- Knopff, Johann Peter (matriculated 25 October 1797; became a medical practitioner in Otterndorf)
- Korb, Wilhelm Friedrich (matriculated 12 April 1799)
- Koritary, Georgius (matriculated 31 October 1798)
- Kortüm, Johann Dietrich Siegfried (1780–1840; matriculated 12 April 1799; became a medical practitioner in Wismar)
- Kottmann, Johann Baptist (1776–1851; matriculated 19 November 1798; became a medical practitioner in the Electorate of Hannover and in Solothurn)
- Kraft, Georg Alexander (matriculated 4 May 1797)
- Kraus, Johann Traugott (matriculated 14 November 1797)
- Krauß, G. F. (born 1773; matriculated 29 April 1795; became a public health officer in Ansbach and Düsseldorf)
- Kriebel, Daniel (died 1804; matriculated 14 May 1798; became a professor and a poet in Eperies)
- Krieg, Jacob (matriculated 23 October 1797)
- Krüger, Georg [Wilhelm (1773–1839), a professor in Neuruppin] (matriculated 17 April 1799)

- Kubli, Melchior (matriculated 14 November 1797)
- Lange, Karl Christian (matriculated 19 October 1798)
- Lange, Johann Georg (matriculated 20 October 1796)
- Langwerth [von], Hieronymous Friedrich Ludwig (matriculated 2 May 1798)
- Lanken [von der], Christoph Diederich Gustav (1780–1831; matriculated 13 October 1798; became a landed proprietor and a historical-geographical writer)
- Lautz, Ferdinand Christoph (matriculated 11 April 1799)
- Lehmus, Adam Theodor Albert Franz (1777–1837; matriculated 27 April 1797; became Deacon and City Preacher in Ansbach)
- Liptay, Matthias (matriculated 23 October 1798)
- Lorenz, Johann Heinrich Ludwig (matriculated 5 June 1797)
- Lunz, Johann Georg (matriculated 30 April 1798)
- Lütgens, Johann (matriculated 5 June 1798 [according to the register at Mülheim])
- Madarasz, Andreas (matriculated 30 April 1798)
- Marcus, Moritz (born 1777; matriculated 30 April 1798, became a medical practitioner in Hamburg)
- Marggraf, Johann Christian Friedrich (matriculated 12 April 1799)
- Martens, Franz Heinrich (1778–1805; matriculated 30 April 1798; became a doctor of medicine, and then a *Privatdozent* and a medical practitioner in Leipzig, and later a Professor in Jena)
- Mathias, J. R...nus
- May, Karl Wilhelm Christian (matriculated 8 May 1797)
- Mayer, Christoph (matriculated 30 April 1798; became a medical practitioner)
- Mellmann, Johann Ernst Stephan Theodor (died 1809; matriculated 1 May 1798; became a professor in a *Gymnasium* in Dortmund)
- Merckle, Elias (matriculated 8 May 1797)
- Merz, Johann Christian (matriculated 18 April 1799)
- Meyer, Albert Friedrich (matriculated 21 April 1796)
- Meyer, Hermann E. (matriculated 2 May 1798)
- Moes, Karl Friedrich (matriculated 11 April 1799)
- Möller, A. S. [Not listed in the register.]
- Möller [Møller], Malte Christian (1771–1834; matriculated 12 May 1794; Doctor)
- Moser, Georg Philipp Ernst (matriculated 19 October 1798)
- Muscate, Albrecht Wilhelm Anton (matriculated 21 April 1799)
- Mussäus, Friedrich G. (matriculated 19 October 1797)
- Neßler, S. [Not listed in the register.]
- Neßler, Ernst Ludwig (matriculated 25 October 1798)
- Nies, Wilhelm Christian (matriculated 11 April 1799)
- Niethammer, Friedrich Elias (matriculated 25 October 1798; became a doctor of medicine in Bamberg)

- Noltenius, Johann Daniel (born 1779; matriculated 7 May 1798; became a senator and a lawyer in Bremen)
- Noltenius, Johann Eberhard (born 1777; matriculated 23 April 1798; became a jurist in Bremen)
- Odebrecht, Gottlieb Christian (matriculated 13 October 1798)
- Oesten, Ludwig Arnold (matriculated 12 April 1799)
- Ording, J.
- Ostermayer, Meno Heinrich (matriculated 221 April 1796)
- Oth, Ludwig Albrecht (1775–1852; matriculated 30 September 1798)
- Paulsen, Peter Friedrich (1777–1804; matriculated 4 May 1798; became a doctor of medicine in Kiel, and then, a medical practitioner)
- Pazmanday [von], Anton (matriculated 23 April 1798)
- Pelzer, Ludwig (matriculated 13 October 1798)
- Pfeiffer, Karl Albrecht Gottl. (matriculated 14 May 1798)
- Pfeiffer, Jakob Christian (matriculated 12 April 1799)
- Polemann, Eduard Bernhard (matriculated 8 May 1797)
- Rahtgen, Siegfried Peter Christian (matriculated 2 May 1798)
- Reese [de], Johann Georg (1779–1841; matriculated 12 April 1799; became a pastor in Abbehausen/Oldenburg)
- Rehm, J. Michael (matriculated 17 April 1799)
- Rittmann, Johann Franz Friedrich (matriculated 17 April 1799)
- Röhler, Johann Friedrich (matriculated 8 May 1797)
- Roiko, Johann (matriculated 30 September 1798)
- Rollwagen, Ludwig (matriculated 26 April 1798)
- Römheld, Karl Gottlieb (matriculated 27 April 1796)
- Röslen, Johann Caspar (matriculated 13 October 1798)
- Roth, Christian Mauritius (matriculated 18 April 1799)
- Roth, Martin Gottlieb (matriculated 30 September 1798)
- Rothplaz, Jakob (matriculated 31 October 1798)
- Rütz, Friedrich (matriculated 13 October 1798)
- Salchow, Johann Christian Daniel (1782–1829; matriculated 30 April 1798; became a *Privatdozent* in Jena, and then, a professor in Halle)
- Salfeld, Christian Heinrich Christoph (matriculated 23 October 1798)
- Schäffer, Johann Gottlieb (matriculated 4 October 1796)
- Scheffler, Samuel Gottlieb (matriculated 22 October 1798)
- Schellenberg, Karl Philipp Salomon (matriculated 19 October 1796)
- Schick, Ludwig (matriculated 7 May 1795)
- Schlemm, Conrad August Gottw. (matriculated 22 October 1798)
- Schmemann, Johan Heinrich Adolph (matriculated 1 May 1798; became a doctor of medicine in Bamberg)
- Schmid, Johann Gottlieb (matriculated 15 May 1797)
- Schönau, Ernst Christian August (matriculated 25 October 1798)
- Schottin, Gottfried Christian Friedrich (matriculated 23 October 1797)

- Schreiber, Narcissus Ulrich (1774–1817; matriculated 8 May 1797; became a doctor of medicine in Bamberg, and then, a medical practitioner in Ulm and Zwiefalten)
- Schröder, August (matriculated 17 April 1799)
- Schroeder, Heinrich (matriculated 13 September 1798)
- Schumann, Friedrich Heinrich (matriculated 10 October 1797)
- Schuster, Johann Peter (1775–1829; matriculated 30 September 1799; became a rector and preacher in Hermannstadt, and a minister in Rothberg)
- Schütz, C. [Not listed in the register.]
- Schwarz, Johann Michael (1774–1858; matriculated 7 November 1798; became a preacher in Prešov)
- Schwarz, Adolph Philipp Theodor (1777–1850; matriculated 7 May 1798; became a pastor in Wiek)
- Schweikart, Ferdinand Karl (1780–1839; matriculated 23 May 1798; became a professor of ethics)
- Schweikert, Karl August (matriculated 7 November 1798)
- Seelig, Christoph Wilhelm (matriculated 23 October 1797; became a medical practitioner in Redwiz)
- Segelken, Gerhard (1775–1816; matriculated 11 May 1797; became a household tutor in Switzerland, and then, a preacher in London and Bremen)
- Seiler, Wilhelm (matriculated 4 May 1798)
- Siegel, Ludwig (matriculated 8 May 1798)
- Siemer, Johann Gottlieb Friedrich (matriculated 3 May 1796)
- Sillich, Karl Ernst Moritz ([according to the register from Meißen] matriculated 23 October 1797)
- Steffens, Henrik [Dr.] (1773–1845; became a professor in Halle, and then in Breslau, and finally in Berlin)
- Stoerzel, August Heinrich (matriculated 22 October 1798)
- Stolz, Johann Jakob (born 1780 in Zürich, matriculated 19 October 1797; Lecturer in Kempten, and then a *Gymnasium* Professor in Ulm, and finally Professor in Bremen)
- Szigesky, Johann (matriculated 17 April 1799)
- Sztaritskay, Samuel (matriculated 23 October 1798)
- Tellmann, Johann (matriculated 1 June 1796)
- Thamert [or Thannert], Chr. G. [Not listed in the register.]
- Theil, Michael (matriculated 25 October 1797)
- Theil, Samuel (matriculated 14 June 1798)
- Thumsener, Justus Gottfried (born 1778; matriculated 2 May 1796; became a lawyer in Bremen)
- Tremmel, Christianus (matriculated 19 October 1798)
- Treviranus, Ludolph Christian (1779–1864; matriculated 9 May 1798; became a doctor of medicine, and then a professor of medicine in Bremen, and finally a professor of natural history in Rostock, Breslau, and Bonn)
- Tscharner, Ludwig (matriculated 7 November 1798)

- Urich, Johan Balthasar (matriculated 17 October 1796)
- Vermehren, Johann Bernhard (1774–1803; matriculated 20 October 1795; a *Dozent* of philosophy in Jena, Poet)
- Villepaille, Louis (matriculated 23 May 1798)
- Vollitz, S. F. [Not listed in the register.]
- Walther, Heinrich (1779–1839; matriculated 13 October 1798; became a medical practitioner in Neubrandenburg)
- Weber, Karl G. (matriculated 23 4 1798)
- Weber, Ludwig F. Ch. (matriculated 23 April 1798)
- Weidner, Georg Gottl. Josias (matriculated 1 May 1798)
- Weilburg, Joseph (matriculated 1 May 1798)
- Wendland, Christian Friedrich Wilhelm (matriculated 1 May 1798)
- Wengeritzky, Andreas (matriculated 23 October 1798)
- Werdt, Johann Friedrich (matriculated 30 September 1798)
- Werlin, Eggert Friedrich Georg (1778–1826; matriculated 17 April 1799; became a pastor in Altona)
- Werren, Johann Baptist (matriculated 31 October 1798)
- Windt, Wilhelm Ferdinand (matriculated 16 May 1797)
- Wolf, Johann Wilhelm Christoph (matriculated 7 November 1798)
- Wolff, Abraham L. (matriculated 7 November 1798)
- Wolff, Samuel (1775–1809; matriculated 10 October 1797; became a preacher in Hermannstadt and then a minister in Kirchberg)
- Wullen, Daniel Renatus (matriculated 31 October 1798)
- Wüstinger, Christian (matriculated 19 October 1798)
- Záborszky, Daniel (matriculated 30 September 1798)
- Zahn, J. [Not listed in the register.]
- Zahn, Michael Philipp Benedikt (matriculated 19 October 1798)
- Zander, Johann Friedrich (matriculated 19 October 1798)
- Zandt, Karl Joseph (matriculated 30 September 1797)
- Zellmann, Christian Karl Friedrich (matriculated 19 May 1794)
- Zembsch, August Ferdinand (matriculated 24 October 1797)
- Zetternau, N. [Not listed in the register.]
- Zucker, Johann Heinrich (matriculated 23 October 1797)

‡

Information about the signatories follows in alphabetical order:

- Albrecht, Christian Daniel (matriculated 19 October 1798)
 Albrecht, Daniel Gustav (matriculated 18 October 1799)
 Ambrosy, Samuel (matriculated 31 October 1798)
 Anshel [Anschel], Voss (matriculated 14 June 1798)
 Augustiny [Augustini], Friederich (1778–1852; matriculated 21 April 1799; became an Evangelical religious leader)
 Bader, Christian Andreas (matriculated 19 October 1797)
 Baier, Hermann Johann Christoph (1775–1822; matriculated 23 October 1797; became a pastor at the Altenkirchen in Rügen)
 Balser, Georg Friedrich Wilhelm (1780–1846; matriculated 23 October 1797; became a doctor of medicine, and later a professor of medicine, in Göttingen)
 Bartels, Wolf Heinrich August (matriculated 24 April 1799)
 Bauer, Johann Friedrich [Jobst] (1776–1821; matriculated 23 April 1799; became a teacher)
 Bäßler, Johann Leonard (matriculated 1 May 1798)
 Behrmann, Heinrich (1770–1836; matriculated 2 May 1798; became a teacher, archivist, and historian in Kopenhagen)
 Bergsträßer, Friedrich (matriculated 26 October 1799)
 Berlin, Johann Georg Wilhelm (died 1833; matriculated 18 October 1799; became a legal councillor in Parchim)
 Bernstein, Johann Theodor Christian (matriculated 20 April 1797; became a medical practitioner in Roßla, Apolda, and Neuwied)
 Besserer [von], Benedikt [-Thalfingen] (matriculated 24 April 1799)
 Boekh [Böckh], Christian Friedrich (1777–1855; matriculated 18 April 1799; became State Councillor and State Minister in Karlsruhe)
 Bogen, Georg Heinrich (matriculated 22 October 1799)
 Brenner, Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Philipp (matriculated 16 October 1799)
 Brentano, Klemens
 Burgold, Johann Christian Karl (1782–1839) (1782–1839; matriculated 4 May 1798; became a tax collector)
 Burkhardt, Johann Lorenz Heinrich (1 May 1798)
 Büser [Büßer], Wilhelm (matriculated 14 October 1797)
 Clausnizer, Christoph August (matriculated 19 October 1798)
 Coll [von], Ludwig Hermann (1776–1811; matriculated 12 April 1797; became a professor of ethics in Jena)
 Collmann, Karl Christian (matriculated 1 May 1799)
 Czerbes, Johann (matriculated 2 May 1798)
 Danneberg, Karl Friedrich Julius (matriculated 24 April 1799)
 Diehls, Johann Andreas (matriculated 25 October 1799)
 Diemer, Joseph Aloys (matriculated 19 October 1798; became High Bailiff in Neresheim)

- Dresler, Johann Karl Jakob (matriculated 1 May 1798)
Dupré, Elias (matriculated 14 May 1798)
Düring, Georg (matriculated 22 November 1797)
Eberlein, G. (matriculated 10 July 1799)
Eißfeld, Karl Friedrich Ludwig (matriculated 15 October 1799)
Eitel, Stephan (matriculated 30 September 1798)
Ell[e]man, Karl (matriculated 22 October 1798)
Englert, Johann Christian Wilhelm (matriculated 27 April 1799)
Erdtmann, Friedrich Ludwig Franz (matriculated 15 October 1799)
Falkner, Johann August Gottfried (matriculated 11 May 1797)
Felmer, Martin Tray (matriculated 2 May 1798)
Friedrichsen, Paul (died 1825; matriculated 24 April 1799; became a medical practitioner in Niebüll)
Fritsch, Johann Ludwig (matriculated 17 April 1799)
Fritzs, Johann Gottlieb (matriculated 12 April 1799)
Gebhard, August Wilhelm (died 1838; matriculated 1 May 1799; became Superintendent in Kranichfeld)
Geiger, Karl Friedrich (matriculated 12 May 1797)
Gellert, Johann Georg (matriculated 15 May 1797 [possibly J. F. Gellert, born in 1781 in Niederfriedersdorf, Oberlausitz, became a preacher in Liebenau])
Georgii, W [This student is possibly Philipp Georgii, who signed the first petition of 20 April 1799, “Students of the University of Jena to Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach.”]
Gerschov, Konrad Theodor (matriculated 13 October 1798)
Gildemeister, Johann Karl Friedrich (1779–1849; matriculated 25 October 1798; became a lawyer and a senator in Bremen)
Göbel, H.
Gordon, Alexander [or Pieter] matriculated 5 September 1799)
Götze [Goetze], Christoph Wilhelm (died 1826; matriculated 25 October 1797; became a doctor of philosophy and a rector in Otterndorf)
Graeter [Gräter], Franz Gottlieb Friedrich (matriculated 28 April 1797)
Grünniger, E.
Hagemayer, C. (matriculated 31 October 1798)
Hardege, Heinrich (matriculated 31 October 1798)
Haynick, Johann Karl A. (matriculated 24 October 1797)
Helmrich, N. [This student is possibly M. Helmrich, who signed the first petition of 20 April 1799, Students of the University of Jena: “First Petition to Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach.”]
Heyer, Konrad Friedrich (matriculated 24 April 1799)
Hiecke, Christian Heinrich (died 1811/12; matriculated 23 October 1798)
Hochstetter, Johann Georg Wilhelm (matriculated 17 April 1799)
Hohnbaum, Ernst Friedrich Karl (born 1780; matriculated 31 October 1798; became a doctor of medicine)
Horn, Ferdinand (matriculated 1 May 1798)

- Horst, Georg [or Johann Jacob] (matriculated 19 November 1798)
- Hoyer, Friedrich Victor (matriculated 15 October 1799)
- Hübbe, Karl Friedrich Wilhelm (1777–1829; became a doctor of medicine and then, a medical practitioner in Ritzebüttel)
- Keller, L [This student is possibly C. Keller, who signed the first petition of 20 April 1799, Students of the University of Jena: “First Petition to Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach.”]
- Kestner, Theodor (matriculated 31 October 1798)
- Kleibert, Johann Heinrich (matriculated 27 April 1799)
- Koch, Christian (born 1781; matriculated 31 October 1798; became a teacher, and then, a professor in Marburg)
- Koch, Johann Adam (1777–1820; matriculated 6 May 1799; became a building inspector in Coburg)
- Koehler, Martin (matriculated 25 October 1798)
- König, L. Heinrich Philipp (matriculated 1 May 1799)
- Kopp, Heinrich Johann (1777–1858; matriculated 1 May 1799; became a medical practitioner and a professor at a secondary school, and then a court councillor)
- Korb, Wilhelm Friedrich (matriculated 12 April 1799)
- Köster, Karl Wilhelm (matriculated 16 October 1799)
- Krantz, L [Not listed in the register.]
- Krauß, G. F. (born 1773; matriculated 29 April 1795; became a public health officer in Ansbach and Düsseldorf)
- Lange, W. [This student is possibly Karl Christian Lange, who signed the first petition of 20 April 1799, Students of the University of Jena: “First Petition to Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach.”]
- Lehmus, Daniel Christian Ludolph (1780–1863; matriculated 21 October 1799; became a professor of mathematics in Berlin)
- Lichtenstein, Martin Heinrich Karl (1780–1857; matriculated 1 May 1799; became a doctor of medicine, and then, an explorer, and later a professor of zoology in Berlin)
- Liebenstein [von], Ludwig August Friedrich (1781–1824; matriculated 27 April 1799; became a jurist and a politician in Baden)
- Lorenz, Johann Heinrich Ludwig (matriculated 5 June 1797)
- Lunz, Johann Georg (matriculated 30 April 1798)
- Majer, Karl Friedrich (matriculated 26 October 1799)
- Marcus, Moritz (born 1777; matriculated 30 April 1798, became a medical practitioner in Hamburg)
- Marggraf, Johann Christian Friedrich (matriculated 12 April 1799)
- Merckle, Elias (matriculated 8 May 1797)
- Merlet, Karl (matriculated 19 November 1799)
- Merz, Johann Christian (matriculated 18 April 1799)
- Meßner, Georg (matriculated 1 May 1799)
- Moser, Georg Philipp Ernst (matriculated 19 October 1798)

- Müller, Johann Christian (matriculated 19 October 1797)
 Muscate, Albreacht Wilhelm Anton (matriculated 21 April 1799)
 Mußäus [Mussäus], Friedrich G. (matriculated 19 October 1797)
 Oesten, Ludwig Arnold (matriculated 12 April 1799)
 Ott, Wolfgang Tobias (matriculated 18 April 1799)
 Paul, Georg (matriculated 13 October 1798)
 Petersen, S. (matriculated 23 October 1798)
 Pfeiffer, Karl Albrecht Gottl. (matriculated 14 May 1798)
 Pollitz, Johann Friedrich (1778–1850; matriculated 17 April 1799; became a rector of a school and then, an archdeacon)
 Posfeldt, Karl Friedrich (matriculated 27 April 1799)
 Preußner, Ludwig Adolph (matriculated 18 October 1799)
 Rehm, J. Michael (matriculated 17 April 1799)
 Ringer, Johann Christian (matriculated 24 April 1799)
 Rippel, Johann Georg Karl (matriculated 8 May 1798)
 Ritschl, Christian Friedrich (matriculated 7 November 1798)
 Rittmann, J. E. [Johann Franz Friedrich] (matriculated 17 April 1799)
 Rodbertus, Johann Karl Christoph (matriculated 18 October 1799)
 Rollwagen, W. Ludwig (matriculated 26 April 1798)
 Roloffs, Friedrich (1777–1822; matriculated 21 April 1799; became a medical practitioner in Plön)
 Roth, Martin Gottlieb (matriculated 30 September 1798)
 Roth, H. Christoph (matriculated 21 May 1799 [or Roth, Karl Friedrich (1780–1852; a state councillor and President of the High Consistory in Munich)
 Sachs [von], Arnold (matriculated 14 October 1797)
 Salchow, Johann Christian Daniel (1782–1829; matriculated 30 April 1798; became a *Privatdozent* in Jena, and then, a professor in Halle)
 Schlitz, Ferdinand (matriculated 23 April 1798)
 Schmidt, Johan Freidrich (matriculated 24 April 1799)
 Schwarz, Adolph Philipp Theodor (1777–1850; matriculated 7 May 1798; became a pastor in Wiek)
 Schweikart, Ferdinand Karl (1780–1839; matriculated 23 May 1798; became a professor of ethics)
 Schweikert, Karl August (matriculated 7 November 1798)
 Seiler, Wilhelm (matriculated 4 May 1798)
 Selpert [von], Jakob Johann Karl (matriculated 22 October 1799)
 Seyffer, Johann Friedrich (1777–1860; matriculated 21 May 1799; became a medical practitioner in Heilbronn)
 Siegel, Ludwig (matriculated 8 May 1798)
 Sternhagen, Martin Friedrich (matriculated 18 October 1799)
 Stieda, Heinrich Wilhelm (matriculated 4 May 1798)
 Trautwein, Friedrich Karl (matriculated 13 October 1798)

- Treviranus, Ludolph Christian (1779–1864; matriculated 9 May 1798; became a doctor of medicine, and then a professor of medicine in Bremen, and finally a professor of natural history in Rostock, Breslau, and Bonn)
- Varrentrapp, Johann Konrad (1799–1860; became a medical practitioner in Frankfurt)
- Voigt, Konrad Emanuel Christoph (matriculated 7 November 1798)
- Volckers, E.
- Walther, Heinrich (1779–1839; matriculated 13 October 1798; became a medical practitioner in Neubrandenburg)
- Warnstedt [von], Karl Wilhelm (matriculated 5 December 1798)
- Weber, C. [Karl G.] (matriculated 23 April 1798)
- Weber, Ludwig F. Ch. (matriculated 23 April 1798)
- Weidner, Georg Gottl. Josias (matriculated 1 May 1798)
- Wendland, Christian Friedrich Wilhelm (matriculated 1 May 1798)
- Werlin, Eggert Friedrich Georg (1778–1826; matriculated 17 April 1799; became a pastor in Altona)
- Werren, Johann Baptist (matriculated 31 October 1798)
- Winkelmann, August Stephan (1780–1806; matriculated 6 May 1799; a *Privatdozent* of a medicine in Göttingen and Braunschweig)
- Wirthmann, Johann Matthias Friedrich (matriculated 24 April 1799)
- Wrangel, Ludwig (matriculated 16 October 1796)
- Zander, Johann Friedrich (matriculated 19 October 1798)
- Zandt, Karl Joseph (matriculated 30 September 1797)

Chapter 10

J. G. Fichte: “From a Private Letter”

Commentary

After the “First Petition to Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach” from the students of the University of Jena was received and abruptly rejected by Karl August, J. G. Fichte spent the summer and fall of 1799 in Berlin.¹ When he returned to Jena in December 1799, he had completed a small book that addressed philosophy and religion, and he was writing a brief response to certain lingering criticisms of his philosophy of religion.² In January 1800, he published his defense, “From a Private Letter,” and his book, *Vocation of Man*.³ When the “Private Letter” appeared, Fichte had already “withstood the worst” of the atheism dispute, so he was hoping for “better times,” recuperating (but still smarting) from his psychic cuts and bruises.⁴ Of all those wounds, the public repudiations by Immanuel Kant and F. H. Jacobi had injured him most deeply.⁵ In his “Private Letter,” Fichte

¹ On 20 April 1799, “First Petition to Karl August Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach” (pp. 220–26 [FG, 6.1, pp. 419–427, No. 823a.]), requesting Fichte’s retention at the university, was submitted and, on the same day, was rejected by Karl August (“First Reply to the University of Jena,” p. 227 FG, 6.1, pp. 435–436, No. 823b.]). Another aborted petition was attempted on 24 April 1799 (GA, III, 3, p. 339n.). Fichte visited Berlin in July 1799 and stayed until late November 1799. He returned to Jena in early December 1799 and emigrated to Berlin permanently in March 1800.

² VM (GA, I, 6, pp. 181–309) and “From a Private Letter,” pp. 252–67 (“Aus einem Privatschreiben,” GA, I, 6, pp. 369–89).

³ “Aus einem Privatschreiben” [“From a Private Letter”] was originally published in *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten*, Vol. IX, No. 4 (January 1800), pp. 358–90. The editors of GA believe Fichte’s “Private Letter” to an unidentified recipient was intended solely as an article for publication in the *Philosophisches Journal* (GA, I, 6, p. 365). Daniel Breazeale suggests that it was intended originally as a *private* letter and not for publication (IWL p. 156 n.). On 10 January 1800, shortly after the publication of Fichte’s “Private Letter,” the students’ “Second Petition to Karl August of Saxony–Weimar–Eisenach” (pp. 227–31 [FG, 6.2, pp. 498–499, No. 990b.]), requesting Fichte’s re-instatement at the university, was submitted. On the same day, Karl August rejected this second petition (“Second Reply to the University of Jena,” p. 231 [FG, 6.2, p. 507, No. 990c.]).

⁴ “From a Private Letter,” pp. 253–54 (GA, I, 6, p. 371).

⁵ Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743–1819) sent a letter to Fichte on 21 March 1799 (GA, III, 3, pp. 224–81). He published this critical letter as *Jacobi an Fichte* (Hamburg: Perthes, 1799). *Jacobi an Fichte* is translated into English as *Jacobi to Fichte* in MPW, pp. 497–536.

responds to various criticisms raised by Jacobi, who claims, in *Jacobi to Fichte*, that Fichte is an *AlleinPhilosoph* [one-sole-philosophy philosopher], who denies “a living, powerful, and active God” and affirms that “we *are* ourselves God, or we ourselves *make* God.”⁶

In *Jacobi to Fichte*, Jacobi contrasts one-sole-philosophy philosophers, who regard their philosophies as unconditionally true, with many-different-philosophy philosophers [*VielPhilosophen*], who regard their philosophies as conditionally true.⁷ Some writers, such as J. G. Dyck, use *one-sole-philosophy* pejoratively, disparaging Fichte for the unconscionable audacity of asserting the truth of the *Wissenschaftslehre*.⁸ Fichte responds by suggesting that the decision to speak, or make any assertions at all, rests “on a pronouncement of universal reason but not on a pronouncement of your own,” so in order to speak “you must be able to vouch for the fact that in the moment that you speak, you are fervently convinced of the

Originally, Fichte perceived *Jacobi to Fichte* as a statement of support, but eventually he realized that it was not supportive and was never intended by Jacobi to be so (EPW, p. 429 [GA, III, 3, pp. 325–33, No. 440]). In the *Intelligencer* of the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* 28 August (1799), Kant (1724–1804) published a “Declaration” wherein he “renounced” any connection to Fichte and dismissed his philosophy as a philosophically insignificant, “totally indefensible,” system of “mere logic” (AA, XII, pp. 370–71). Kant’s “Declaration” is translated into English as “Declaration concerning Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*” in *Kant’s Correspondence*, (ed. and trans.) Arnulf Zweig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 559–61.

⁶ The accusations in this sentence are Jacobi’s, but the last quotation is Fichte’s (*Jacobi to Fichte*, MPW, pp. 503–506 and 523–26 [GA III, 3, pp. 228–31 and 250–53] and “Private Letter,” p. 255 [GA, I, 6, p. 372]). The term *Alleinphilosoph* [one-sole-philosophy philosopher] is translated as “quintessential philosopher” in MPW. Fichte responds to Kant in the *Intelligencer* of the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* (GA, III, 4, 75) and in an announcement of a new presentation of the *Wissenschaftslehre* that was published in several newspapers (“Public Announcement of a New Presentation of the *Wissenschaftslehre*,” IWL, pp. 186–201 [GA, I, 7, pp. 153–64]). This advertisement was meant to announce the publication of a book drawn from Fichte’s lectures on WLN (WLN [K] and WLN [H]), but he was unable to complete the project.

⁷ *Jacobi to Fichte*, MPW, pp. 503–506 (GA III, 3, pp. 228–31). The poet and critic Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829) accused Jacobi of scorning “philosophical reason,” of being an “impure philosopher,” and of lacking the quintessential [one-sole-philosophy] spirit of the quintessential [one-sole-philosophy] philosophy. See Schlegel’s review of Jacobi’s *Woldemar* in *Deutschland*, Vol. III, No. 8 (1796): pp. 202, 205, and 210–11.

⁸ Johann Gottfried Dyck (1750–1813), a poet and publisher in Leipzig, *Ueber des Herrn Professor Fichte Appellation an das Publikum. Eine Anmerkung aus der deutschen Uebersetzung des Ersten Bandes von Saint-Lamberts Tugendkinst besonders abgedruckt* (Leipzig, 1799), p. 6. Fichte’s response to Dyck’s view is equally disparaging: “[O]f all the uninteresting things the least interesting is the inconclusive opinion of some particular individual” (“Private Letter,” p. 264n. [GA, I, 6, p. 375n.]).

absolute universal validity of your assertion."⁹ This aspect of human thought and deed in no sense precludes the possibility of recognizing and revising errors on the basis of future advice, reflection, or experience.

According to Jacobi, Fichte, like any one-sole-philosophy philosopher, is possessed by a pure logical drive to pursue philosophical knowledge as an end in itself. Given Fichte's concept of philosophical task and method, only the *Wissenschaftslehre* could be a true philosophy, namely, a *science* (a grounded, utterly consistent, and entirely complete system) that explains all human consciousness. On this point, Jacobi and Fichte agree.¹⁰ "Not only philosophy but all science is essentially *one-sole-science* science. Every philosopher is necessarily a *one-sole-philosophy* philosopher, for if he is not one, then he is mistaken and is *not* a philosopher *at all*."¹¹ Moreover, Jacobi grants that Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* is the supreme and definitive one-sole-philosophy philosophy.¹²

Jacobi's objection to Fichte is not that he is a *one-sole-philosophy* philosopher but that he is a *philosopher*; because Fichte, as a philosopher, wants his system of knowledge, the *Wissenschaftslehre*, to contain the "foundation of all truth" whereas Jacobi, as a non-philosopher, wants "this foundation (the *true* itself)" to lie outside of philosophy and all other knowledge.¹³

⁹ "Private Letter," pp. 264–65n. (GA, I, 6, p. 375n.). Fichte regards the decision to speak as he regards any other decision to act: In order to have the intellectual and moral *right* to act, one must first be convicted of the universal theoretical and practical validity of one's decision to act. In this respect, Fichte anticipates the French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), who claimed that when one makes a choice, one makes it for all of humanity, that is, one affirms that choice as not simply good for oneself in particular but as good for mankind in general.

¹⁰ "Both of us, living only in the spirit and honest seekers at any cost, are well enough in agreement, I think, about the concept of science" (*Jacobi to Fichte*, MPW, p. 505 [GA, III, 3, pp. 231]).

¹¹ "Private Letter," pp. 259–60n. (GA, I, 6, pp. 375–76n.). Compare Jacobi: "[I]t is only by deceitful pretence that in my writings I here and there give the impression of belonging among the quintessential [one-sole-philosophy] philosophers [...] I am everywhere *impure* [...] I am only a *natural* philosopher and an *incidental* writer" (MPW, p. 504 [GA, III, 3, pp. 229–30]), commentator's interpolations. Fichte notes that mathematicians, the least tolerant of scientists, understand this notion of science perfectly and would scoff at anyone who denied it ("Private Letter," p. 265n. [GA, I, 6, pp. 375–76n.]).

¹² Jacobi: "Among the Jews of speculative reason I proclaim you once again, ever more zealously and loudly, their King. I threaten the obdurate, that they recognize you as such and accept the Baptist from Königsberg [Kant] only as your prophet instead" (*Jacobi to Fichte*, MPW, p. 503 [GA, III, 3, p. 227]), commentator's interpolations. See also *Jacobi to Fichte*, MPW, p. 507 (GA, III, 3, p. 233).

¹³ *Jacobi to Fichte*, MPW, pp. 505–506 (GA, III, 3, pp. 231–32). Jacobi refers to his own mode of thinking as a non-philosophy that produces non-knowledge (*Jacobi to Fichte*, MPW, pp. 501 and 505 [GA, III, 3, pp. 226 and 231]).

Jacobi distinguishes between finite truth, which is generated by the human activity of knowing (or conception) and the infinite true, which is only intimated by the human activity of non-knowing (or faith).¹⁴ He fears that Fichte imprisons the true, and thereby God, within his system of knowledge by transforming the infinite and divine into mere finite truth. Fichte protests that everyone (even the philosopher) is a non-philosopher at the standpoint of life, which is also the standpoint of faith.¹⁵ At the standpoint of life, faith suffices to establish the non-philosopher's relation to the divine and the philosopher's "foundation of all truth." However, at the standpoint of philosophy, the philosopher shows how our thoughts about the objects of faith relate to the rest of our thinking: the philosopher does not transform the objects of faith but rather illuminates their origin as necessary aspects of experience.¹⁶ In anticipation of his *Vocation of Man*, Fichte claims that ultimately the *Wissenschaftslehre* does nothing more than protect true living faith by eradicating false philosophical doctrines.¹⁷

The *Wissenschaftslehre* justifies and reconciles the seemingly conflicting assumptions that underpin the practice of both natural science and religion. In "Doubt," the first book of *Vocation of Man*, a natural, or untrained native, philosopher finds his moralistic, spiritualistic faith in conflict with his dogmatic, materialistic philosophy. During the course of the *Vocation of Man* (in the second and third books, "Knowledge" and "Faith"), the erstwhile distressed philosopher learns that transcendental idealism reconciles belief in a spiritual world with knowledge of a material world, because it bases sensible experience of the material world on intellectual intuition of the spiritual world. At peace with this philosophical knowledge, the native philosopher is then free to return to the standpoint of life and wander freely between science and religion without fear that natural science can undermine his faith or the meaning of his life. Fichte believes that Jacobi's failure to grasp this distinction, between life and philosophy, faith and knowledge, is the root of their disagreements.¹⁸

¹⁴ *Jacobi to Fichte*, MPW, p. 513 (GA, III, 3, p. 239).

¹⁵ The philosopher is only a philosopher when he is engaged in the act of philosophizing.

¹⁶ "Private Letter," pp. 257–58 (GA, I, 6, p. 377).

¹⁷ "I asserted that my philosophy of religion no more intends to produce something new in people's minds than does any other part of my philosophy. (Instead, it intends to liberate their minds from all of the useless acquisitions with which they have been burdened by other systems [specifically dogmatic philosophy, or material determinism].)" "Private Letter," p. 257 (GA, I, 6, p. 377), commentator's interpolation. The *Wissenschaftslehre* justifies and reconciles the seemingly conflicting assumptions that underpin the practice of both natural science and religion. See VM (GA, I, 6, pp. 181–309).

¹⁸ See Fichte's response to *Jacobi to Fichte* in his letter "To Reinhold" and the appended "Fragment" in EPW, pp. 428–37 (GA, III, 3, pp. 325–33, No. 440). In VM, Fichte revisits this issue in detail, offering a parody of Jacobi in the second book, "Knowledge." For a discussion of this disagreement and of the relation between VM and the Jena

In *Jacobi to Fichte*, Jacobi says that Fichte "posits a concept, a thing of thought, a generality, in lieu of the living God" when he calls God the moral world-order.¹⁹ For Jacobi, a "moral world-order" entails a limited thought constructed by men, which is a description of the ordered co-existence between men, rather than an unlimited, efficacious force, which is always creating order 'outside, before, and above' man.²⁰ In his "Private Letter," Fichte argues that this criticism ignores not only his own explicit portrayal of God as "living and active" in "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance" but also his characteristic use of language in his *Wissenschaftslehre*.²¹ Fichte treats a conceptual term as a name that summarizes a process of intelligible activity.²² Within the *Wissenschaftslehre*, terms signify, or symbolize, "concepts," or acts of thinking. When Fichte speaks of the *concept* or idea of God, he intends that "God" be understood as a name that refers to our thinking about an unlimited efficacious activity rather than as an exhaustive definition that delimits the divine nature. Likewise, when Fichte says that God is the moral world *order*, he intends that "order" be understood as an ongoing activity of ordering the dynamic relationship between events rather than as a completed passive order of the static relations between things.²³ Consequently, Jacobi wrongly accuses Fichte of rejecting the divine life, power, and activity and of reducing God to an imaginative or arbitrary construct.²⁴

Wissenschaftslehre, see Yves Radrizzani, "The Place of the *Vocation of Man* in Fichte's Work," *New Essays on Fichte's later Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002), pp. 317–44.

¹⁹ *Jacobi to Fichte*, MPW, pp. 524 (GA, III, 3, p. 252); see also "Private Letter," pp. 255–56 (GA, I, 6, p. 373). Compare Jacobi: "God is, and is *outside me, a living, self-subsisting being*, or I am God. There is no third" (*Jacobi to Fichte*, MPW, p. 524 [GA, III, 3, p. 252]). See also *Jacobi to Fichte*, MPW, pp. 524–26 (GA, III, 3, pp. 251–53). This criticism was also raised by Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741–1801) in "Johann Kaspar Lavater an Fichte" ["Johann Kaspar Lavater to Fichte"] of 7–12 February 1799, GA, III, 3, pp. 187–93.

²⁰ *Jacobi to Fichte*, MPW, p. 524 (GA, III, 3, p. 252).

²¹ "[M]y words on p. 15 [of "Divine World-Governance"] expressly run as follows: 'That *living and active* moral order is God'" ("Private Letter," p. 255 [GA, I, 6, p. 373]). See "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," pp. 26–27 (GA, I, 5, p. 354). Note: "I said that *I had the right to demand* that one not judge me without being familiar with my linguistic usage" ("Private Letter," p. 257 [GA, I, 6, p. 376]).

²² "One passes through concepts in order to shorten the way and to arrive at one's goal more quickly" (p. 255 [GA, I, 6, p. 373–374]). "If I manufacture a new concept within myself, then, of course, the sign by means of which I label it *for you* (because, for me, it never requires a sign) means something that is new to you; the word receives a new meaning, since up to now you have not been in possession of what is being referred to" ("Private Letter," pp. 256–57 [GA, I, 6, p. 374]).

²³ "Private Letter," p. 256 (GA, I, 6, pp. 373–74).

²⁴ Fichte discusses his unique approach to philosophical terms, concepts, and arguments in "Concerning the Difference between the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy"

In *Jacobi to Fichte*, Jacobi proclaims: If man “resists finding himself in God as his creator” then all reality evaporates into “his own nothingness;” so man must choose between “Nothingness or a God; if he chooses nothingness, he makes himself into a God.”²⁵ Jacobi accuses Fichte of performing this very nihilization and “self-divinization” by grounding religious belief on individual moral consciousness.²⁶ According to some of Fichte’s critics, this means that Fichte is a pantheist, who maintains that the moral world-order, of God, consists in the relationship between individual moral subjects.²⁷ Jacobi, however, claims that Fichte exceeds pantheism: The *Wissenschaftslehre* is an egoism, which reduces all reality to individual self-consciousness, and a nihilism, which reduces all value to meaningless individual existence.²⁸

In response to the greater charge of egoism and nihilism, and the lesser charge of pantheism, Fichte argues that the moral world-order, the goal of morality, and the act of individual moral willing must be distinguished.²⁹ Morality requires no more or less than that the moral subject will in accordance with the duties commanded by the moral law. For the moral subject, considered only in terms of its will, the sole motive and goal of morality is the act of moral willing itself.³⁰ However, for the moral subject, considered also in terms of its cognition, every event must be thought as one member of an ordered series of events, because thinking is discursive; so every act of moral willing must also be thought of as one member of an ordered series of moral activities.³¹ Likewise, an ordered series of events must be thought of as connected through some ordering energy; so the ordered series of moral activities must also be thought of as connected through

(EPW, pp. 192–216) and in ASL, pp. 32–33. For additional discussion of what it means to speak of the *concept* of God, see *Appeal to the Public*, pp. 103–104 and 107–108 (GA, I, 5, pp. 428 and 433) and *Juridical Defense*, pp. 176–80 (GA, I, 6, pp. 49–52).

²⁵ *Jacobi to Fichte*, MPW, pp. 523–24 (GA, III, 3, p. 250).

²⁶ *Jacobi to Fichte*, MPW, p. 524 (GA, III, 3, p. 251).

²⁷ Fichte says that this accusation first arose in an anonymous review of the *Appeal to the Public*, which was published in columns 401–16 of the *Oberdeutsche allgemeine Literaturzeitung* (March 1, 1799). The reviewer criticized Fichte for not accounting for the creation of the moral world-order (p. 254, GA, I, 6, p. 372).

²⁸ *Jacobi to Fichte*, MPW, pp. 517–19 (GA, III, 3, pp. 243–45): “If the highest I can recollect in me, that I can intuit, is my I, empty and pure, naked and bare, with its self-subsistence and freedom, then reflective self-intuition is a curse for me, and so is rationality ... I curse my existence.”

²⁹ “Private Letter,” pp. 258–62 and 264 (GA, I, 6, pp. 379–383 and 388).

³⁰ “Private Letter,” pp. 260–62 (GA, I, 6, pp. 381–83).

³¹ *Ibid.* To say that we must think discursively means that thinking is limited temporally and thus, that we cannot conceive of anything as a whole but must separate it into a series of parts arranged one after the other. For additional discussion by Fichte of how the discursivity of thinking requires us to think of the supersensible, see WLN, p. 173 (WLN [K], p. 67 and WLN [H], p. 61) and ASL, p. 64.

some ordering energy, or moral world-order.³² Failure to make these distinctions between the various aspects of the supersensible world leads some people (Jacobi) to believe that Fichte equates the individual personality and God; it leads others (the people who accuse Fichte of pantheism) to believe that Fichte equates the relationship between everyone's individual personalities and God; and finally, it leads yet another type of person (the dogmatist and eudaemonist who are unaware of anything supersensible) to believe that Fichte is simply Godless.³³ Recognition of these distinctions shows that the moral world-order, or God, is not reducible to the individual moral subject or to relations between individual moral subjects and, moreover, that morality and religious belief are intimately connected.

In the "Private Letter," Fichte recollects that the predictions he had made in the *Appeal to the Public* about how he would be treated during the atheism dispute were "fulfilled word for word" and he predicts that he will later present his *Religionslehre* "using other terms and expressions" and that his critics will discover it is "not nearly as bad as they had thought at first."³⁴ This "prophecy" was partly fulfilled by the *Vocation of Man*, which provides a more accessible presentation of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, a more complete development of his *Religionslehre*, and a pasquinade of the transformation of the *Wissenschaftslehre* into "unquestionable atheism" and "shallow, baseless, irrational twaddle" by Jacobi and other critics.³⁵ It will be completely fulfilled six years later by the *Way to the Blessed Life: Or also, the Religionslehre*, Fichte's final presentation of his account of God and religion; but long before this prediction comes to pass, Fichte writes a last response to his critics—a "Concluding Remark by the Editor" of the *Philosophisches Journal*—in the final moment of the atheism dispute.³⁶

³² "Private Letter," pp. 258–59 (GA, I, 6, p. 379).

³³ "Private Letter," pp. 260 and 262–63 (GA, I, 6, pp. 381 and 384).

³⁴ "Private Letter," pp. 252 and 264 (GA, I, 6, pp. 369 and 370).

³⁵ "Private Letter," pp. 252 and 264 (GA, I, 6, pp. 369 and 389).

³⁶ ASL, p. 3 and "Concluding Remark by the Editor," pp. 276–81 (GA, I, 6, pp. 411–16).

Text: “From a Private Letter”

<GA, I, 6, p. 369>

You ask me why I so peacefully tolerate the distortions that are being inflicted in a truly unprecedented manner on my theory of religion. My answer is that powerful people have already declared that my doctrine is atheism. These people must be right in what they say, and those commentators must provide evidence of both their own zeal for orthodoxy and their unlimited devotion to those powerful people. Therefore, *they*—who had my essay before them for about half a year without perceiving the slightest hint of atheism in it—have since interpreted my words in such a fashion that a noticeable atheism emerges from them.³⁷

“This publication is an atheistic one.” This was the first proposition that they started from, and it has not occurred to them to raise the smallest doubt about its correctness. “Consequently, it must be understood and explicated in such a way that it turns out to be atheistic.” This is the very natural inference that they made. Their wish has been granted. What they have circulated as my theory is certainly, by my own admission, a most unquestionable atheism; furthermore, it is shallow, baseless, irrational twaddle.

I do not wish to disturb them just now in this affair that has been made their business in this way. I have almighty time on my side. In the end *they* will find that they have done quite enough. Later on *I* will again present what I have really presented; and I will do so using other terms and expressions, as I have done and will do henceforth with all of my philosophical subjects. People will finally become bold enough to look this frightening thing in the eye, and they will find that it is not nearly as bad as they had thought at first. It will become clear to one person through one expression, to another person through another expression; and it will gradually manage to please everyone quite nicely. Then one portion of my literary brethren will cry out, “There is nothing more to it than this? What a fuss the man has made! <370> We have known this for a long

³⁷ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 21–29 (GA, I, 5, pp. 347–57). The powerful people to whom Fichte refers would include the Ecclesiastical Consistory of Saxony and various members of Saxon Elector Friedrich August’s court and council who originally condemned the essay. Those who had the essay before them for “half a year” would be the advisors to Duke Karl August of Saxony–Weimar as well as the members of the other Ernestine Courts who declared the essay to be atheistic after Friedrich August requested universal compliance with the confiscation of the *Philosophisches Journal* from the Saxon dukes of all the Ernestine Courts in his “Kurfürstl. Sächsisches Requisitions-schreiben an die Herzöge der Ernestischen Höfe vom 18 Dezembre 1798” [“Electoral Saxon Requisition Letter to the Dukes of the Ernestine Courts” of 18 December 1798] (“Acta Die Confiscirung und Censur, ingleichen die Leipziger und andere Zeitungen btr. Vol. XII 1798–1800, Loc. 55 n. 8 der Geheimen Canzley in K. S. Hauptstaats-Archiv,” p. 59). Likewise, Fichte probably intends the authors of the various—often anonymous—critiques directed at him during the atheism dispute.

time, without our ever taking the slightest notice of it. We never understood *Kant* in any other way." Another portion will cry out, "Look! Here is yet another man who obeys and is improved by criticism. See how he, after having been instructed by us, retracts his old errors. Of course, it is not right of him either to attempt to do so in a way that no one is supposed to notice or to intend to deprive us of the honor that is properly ours. But look, we will honor ourselves! Formerly, he was an atheist, and we were right in what we were saying. But now, fortunately, we have converted him." I have not yet decided, my friend, whether or not I will permit these good people this pious pleasure and allow their blindness to go untreated.

But you will say that one must not let this prophecy be spread about in advance, for then it will not come to pass. Oh, my friend, here I am dealing with people whose actions can be predicted quite effortlessly, who become greatly irritated that one can sincerely think so badly of them, and who from then on go forth and act as one said they would! Therefore, in my *Appeal to the Public* I explained at length how they would deal with me.³⁸ A unanimous cry rose up that I was exaggerating, that I portrayed the matter crudely and unfairly. But before a year passed all that I had predicted was fulfilled word for word, and by the very people who had cried out. Consequently, I have withstood the worst, and now I live in hope of better times.

While I was writing my first and hitherto only defenses against the accusation of atheism, I was in fact in a foul mood; and afterwards it did not surprise me in the least that most people maintain that in these defenses I have only further incriminated myself but have by no means defended myself.³⁹ "You are an atheist; you have professed atheism in this, that, and the other passage." This has simply been shouted at me, but no one has explained to me *how* he extracted atheism from these passages. I was accused from out of the blue; I could only defend myself from out of the blue, because I myself was speculating wherein the misunderstanding might reside. Perhaps, I thought, it rests in the concept of personality, or in the concept <371> of substance, existence, and the like; and thereby I only broached new points that they would probably have left undisturbed. I was not close to hitting on the right thing to do. Oh, my friend, I completely lack the skill for detecting the inconsistencies and contradictions that ceaselessly bustle about and patiently tolerate one another in the minds of our pseudo-intellectuals, and I completely lack the skill for always keeping in mind that a general reminder gets nowhere with such people if it is not repeated anew at every single instance of its application and if its application is not made explicit! I lack this skill, and I fear that I will never obtain it through any experience and will always continue to speak to the public as if it had some

³⁸ *Appeal to the Public*, pp. 92–125 (GA, I, 5, pp. 415–53). See also (GA, I, 5, pp. 418–19 and 421–23).

³⁹ *Appeal to the Public*, pp. 92–125 (GA, I, 5, pp. 415–53) and *Juridical Defense*, pp. 157–204 (GA, I, 6, pp. 26–84).

measure of persistence and were itself able to derive various consequences from general principles. I always know quite well—after the fact—how I could have prevented *this* misunderstanding. (I leave for the good gods the question of which other misunderstandings are coming down the road.) But whoever tells me this *before* the fact, and whoever discovers the art of writing in such a way that one really says something and yet cannot be misunderstood at all—he shall be for me the great Apollo.

This time, of course, I have obtained the relevant information. The first *learned* rebuke of that notorious essay (which is in the first issue of the current volume of this journal) to come to my attention was that of a reviewer writing in the *Oberdeutsche allgemeine Literaturzeitung*.⁴⁰ This honest author—despite the fact that from time to time one comes across gross mistakes in that learned journal (as is likewise the case in other learned journals), there prevails in it, on the whole, a <372> tone of honesty, of love of truth, and of impartiality that one frequently feels is missing in other journals—this honest author, I say, asserts that if the moral world-order of which I speak is supposed to exist not only *in* and *for* finite moral beings but also *outside* of them, then my system can defend itself against the charge of atheism; and he calls on me simply to speak up and explain myself on this point.⁴¹ “Honorable man,” I thought, “you would perhaps do well to read my essay one more time, and you would then require no further explanation of a point that to my knowledge is as clear as day. Who knows how hard it has been made for you, sitting in some lonely cell, to penetrate into the light that you have actually won for yourself and to secure the use of the most common literary resources that would instruct you about this matter?”⁴² A second person will not easily misunderstand me in the way that *you* have misunderstood me!” This is how I was thinking not quite a year ago. I no longer think this, and now I sincerely offer a full apology to that man. Nearly everyone has misunderstood me as he misunderstood me. I was able to glean little or nothing possessing any clarity from the myriad confused nonsense that has been written against me, until finally, *in oral interviews, through questions and answers* from brave men (to whom, of course, one may not attribute familiarity with modern speculation), I extracted the following from these men: “My doctrine is—if, out of tolerance, one is willing to spare me the odious term *atheism*—at the very least *pantheism*. According to me (p. 15), *the moral world-order is itself God*,

⁴⁰ The “notorious essay” is “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 21–29 (GA, I, 5, pp. 347–57). The “learned rebuke” is an anonymous review of Fichte’s *Appeal to the Public* that was published in the *Oberdeutsche allgemeine Literaturzeitung* (March 1, 1799), pp. 401–16 wherein the author criticizes Fichte for not accounting for the creation of the moral world order.

⁴¹ *Oberdeutsche allgemeine Literaturzeitung* (March 1, 1799), column 414.

⁴² Fichte seems to imply that the anonymous author occupied a monastic cell insofar as he considers the *Oberdeutsche allgemeine Literaturzeitung* to be a Catholic journal.

and we require no other God.⁴³ Indeed, it is *they*, and *I*, and *we all* who are the members constituting this moral world, and *our relationship to one another* (in the meantime it may remain undecided whether this relationship exists without our involvement or is brought forth by our morality) is the *order* of this world. Consequently, either we *are* ourselves God, or we ourselves *make* God every day, and nothing similar to a God except ourselves remains anywhere." Thus informed, I also found it easier to glean roughly the same thing from the confused nonsense mentioned above, <373> and since then it has no longer surprised me in the least to read, not only in the work of the most insignificant of those among the philosophical reviewers and occasional writers, but also in the work of men who have undeniably penetrated into the innermost depths of speculation, that I deny a *living, powerful, and active* God (despite the fact that my words on p. 15 expressly run as follows: "That *living and active* moral order is God"), that my God is a *concept through and through*, and the like.⁴⁴

That is how things stand with respect to this misunderstanding. These people have nothing but *concepts* as the immediate object of their philosophizing, concepts that are already to hand and dead in themselves; and what they call philosophizing is at most the development of these concepts. They hear the word "order" mentioned. Well, to be sure, they understand this expression. It refers to the *manufactured*, already completed, determinate co-existence of [the elements of] a manifold, as well as their *existence* in succession—as in the way, for example, that household furnishings stand in some room in a particular order (*ordo ordinatus*) [ordered order]. That this word can also have a higher meaning does not occur to them, because they completely lack the organ for this higher meaning. If they hear someone who says, "God is the moral world-order," then the reasoning laid down above stands in readiness; and *for them* it is correct, inescapable, and irrefutable. On the basis of their premises they *can* reach a conclusion in no other way than this.

By way of contrast, something that is stable, at a standstill, and dead can never enter the orbit of what *I* call philosophy. Everything in philosophy is act, motion, and life. It finds nothing but rather lets everything arise before its eyes; and this is so much the case that I completely refuse to extend the name "philosophy" to the aforementioned consorting with dead concepts. For me, this is merely reasoning on behalf of *real life*, whose pursuits are directly opposed to speculation. One passes through concepts in order to shorten the way and to arrive at one's goal more quickly. This goal must in turn be some action if all

⁴³ "Divine World-Governance," pp. 26–27 (GA, I, 5, p. 354).

⁴⁴ "Divine World-Governance," pp. 26–27. Fichte omits the original "*selbst*" ["itself"] from this quotation. The criticism that Fichte's God was merely a concept rather than "a living, self-subsisting being" outside of us was expressed most explicitly in *Jacobi to Fichte*, MPW, pp. 524–26 (GA, III, 3, pp. 251–53). See also "Johann Kaspar Lavater an Fichte" of 7–12 February 1799 (GA, III, 3, p. 193). Fichte considered Jacobi to be among those who had "penetrated into the innermost depths of speculation."

of our thinking is not to have been an empty game. Consequently, whenever I make use of the term “order” [*Ordnung*] in any utterance or writing that I treat as *philosophical*, then it is clear without further ado, and should be clear without further ado, that by this term I mean only an <374> *active ordering* (*ordo ordinans*).⁴⁵ I am so attached to this linguistic usage that I understand every word ending in “-ung” in this fashion. For example, by “effect” [*Wirkung*] I always mean the very act of effecting but never (as certainly happens with other philosophers) the effect. For the latter I say “what is effected” [*das Bewirkte*]. I am so attached to this linguistic usage that no other meaning ever comes into my thoughts when I am philosophizing in an unconstrained manner, and that one could have shouted at me, “You are an atheist,” for perhaps another ten years, without my becoming aware on my own that the basis of the misunderstanding may well rest here.

But, then, do I have a right to demand that one be familiar with this linguistic usage of mine? Without a doubt, for I have openly and amply pointed out this property of my philosophy, that is, that it only deals with what is living and by no means with what is dead. I have even pointed this out in the *Philosophisches Journal*.⁴⁶ And reasonable readers can undoubtedly draw the modest inference that, since this is how it is with all of my philosophical subjects, the same will also be the case in the matter of a moral world-order. There are, however, men who read, judge, pass sentence on, and write about a single essay by a systematic philosopher, men who have otherwise not read a line by him, and who are quite proud of this!

But why do I not abide by customary linguistic usage? My friend, I would hope that you will find the opportunity to say to those who ask this question that I for my part regard this sort of talk as one of the “formal absurdities” of our time, an absurdity that, it is to be hoped, is only repeated from one person to the next, each doing so on the authority of the previous person, without a single person questioning what he is saying. Requiring a thinker who really intends to produce something new to abide by customary linguistic usage is—except for the hyperbole—just the same as if one required the *Pescheras* to produce European arts, sciences, and customs, yet to do so using the words and definitions found in their language heretofore.⁴⁷ If I manufacture a new concept within myself, then, of course, the sign by means of which I label it *for you* (because, for me, it

⁴⁵ Daniel Breazeale notes that Fichte’s distinction between an “ordered order” [*ordo ordinatus*] and an “active ordering” [*ordo ordinans*], or ordering order, is very similar to Baruch Spinoza’s distinction between *natura naturata* and *natura naturans* (EPW, p. 160 n. 6).

⁴⁶ *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre*: “Second Introduction,” EPW, pp. 46–7 (GA, I, 4, pp. 216–217). The *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre* originally appeared in the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten*, Vol. V, No. 4 (Jena/Leipzig: Gabler, 1797).

⁴⁷ The *Pescheras* were the original inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego.

never requires a sign) means something that is new to you; the word receives a new meaning, since up to now you have not been in possession of what is being referred to. If someone says, "Up to now you have not had a correct philosophy; I will create one for you," then without a doubt this person simultaneously says, "You have also not had a <375> correct linguistic usage in philosophical matters; I must also create this for you along the way." Should you pick a fight with him, then I advise you, in a friendly way, only to attack his philosophy directly, but not to attack his linguistic usage. If you succeed in conquering the former, then its linguistic usage will perish without further ado. But if you cannot find fault with his philosophy, then you will have to learn its linguistic usage that much more in order to penetrate into it. "You should abide by the customary linguistic usage." Basically, this means, "You should abide by the customary *mode of thought* and not produce any innovations." To be sure, it is possible that those who employ this sort of talk really understand it in this way; however, they could express their true opinion in a much more direct fashion.*

<376> I said that *I had the right to demand* that one not judge me without being familiar with my linguistic usage. Then, however—and this is by <377> far the chief issue—one should be able to discern from the context what the concept of a moral world-order means for me. My friend, you have the opportunity to meet with my opponents. Lay this context before them and provide them with an overview of my reasoning in that notorious essay.⁴⁸ With this purpose in mind, I will now lay this before you.

First of all, I asserted—and that I am still not understood with respect to what is the chief and characteristic point of my system is indeed odd—I asserted that my philosophy of religion no more intends to produce something new in people's minds than does any other part of my philosophy.⁴⁹ (Instead, it intends to liberate their minds from all of the useless acquisitions with which they have been burdened by other systems.) For the non-philosopher—and in life we are all necessarily non-philosophers—something exists, remains in existence, and irresistibly presses itself upon him; and no effort on his part can do away with it.⁵⁰ This suffices for his pursuits. The philosopher, however, is under the obligation to derive this "something" from the entire system of our thought and to connect it with that system; he is under the obligation to point out the *position* of this "something" within that necessary system. During this process this "something" remains what it is and is not altered. If the philosopher had to alter it in order to

⁴⁸ "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," pp. 21–29 (GA, I, 5, 347–57).

⁴⁹ "On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance," pp. 21–22 (GA, I, 5, p. 348).

⁵⁰ By "non-philosopher" Fichte means anyone who is not philosophizing—and of course, the philosopher himself is not philosophizing at every moment—but he also likely means Jacobi, who described himself as a non-philosopher (*Jacobi to Fichte*, MPW, pp. 501 and 505 [GA, III, 3, pp. 226 and 231]).

be able to derive it, then this would be proof that he did not understand his trade and that his philosophy was false. (I said this on pp. 2–4 where I wrote, “What has up to now almost universally confused our point of view ... how does a human being come to have that belief?”)⁵¹ Therefore—and say this quite loudly to my opponents—my philosophy alters nothing with respect to *religion* as it has lived in the hearts of all well-meaning people from the beginning of the world and will live on until the end of time; and were my philosophy to alter anything, it would certainly be false. I am engaged in a pursuit that no one before me has undertaken with complete precision, and to that extent it is something new. I am concerned with the *derivation* (deduction) of the *aforementioned religion from the essence of reason*—not in order to teach religion to people by means of this derivation, but rather merely and solely for a *scientific* purpose. No one who has not already penetrated into the inner nature of my philosophy can debate this purpose with me. But something in *theology* (to the extent that this word refers not to the *doctrine of religion*, that is, the doctrine of *God’s relationship to finite beings*, but rather to what it should actually refer, that is, the doctrine of *God’s essence in and <378> for Himself, apart from any relation to finite beings*) should be changed by this philosophy—yes, just say this to them directly—this theology should be entirely annihilated for being a phantasm of the brain that surpasses every finite power of comprehension.**

According to my philosophy, the *position* of religious belief—for the ordinary religious person, its position can not only rightly remain hidden but must remain all but hidden; however, its position should be familiar to someone who teaches the people, so that he can prepare his plan <379> of religious guidance accordingly—the position of that “something” in the system of necessary thought (the “something” to which religious belief attaches itself and from which it proceeds) is *the necessary goal of man’s obedience to the command of duty*.

On p. 8 the concept of the supersensible is formulated as follows: (1) “I find myself free of every influence of the sensible world, absolutely active in myself and through myself. (2) This freedom is not indeterminate (with respect to a goal); it has its goal.”⁵²

Now ask my opponent—for this is the decisive point that has been completely overlooked in this misunderstanding—ask him whether or not this freedom (no. 1) and this goal of freedom (no. 2) are identical, or whether they are two different things. Make this clear to him by means of a sensible example if, of course, you are confident of his replying in such a way that he will not extend this example beyond the point of comparison, which here solely touches on the distinction between an action and the goal lying outside of the action itself. Tell him, “You go out, say, to sow seeds. For the time being this may count as your action. But

⁵¹ “Divine World-Governance,” pp. 21–22 (GA, I, 5, p. 348).

⁵² This is a paraphrase of “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 23–24 (GA, I, 5, p. 351).

without a doubt you are not sowing merely in order to be sowing, but rather so that your seeds will sprout and bear fruit. The latter, the future harvest, is no longer your action but rather the goal of your action; and you will doubtless see that this is not one thing but rather two."

Now question him further: "Does your sowing, does your scattering seeds over the ground, contain the *final sufficient reason* for sprouting and bearing fruit? This much, of course, is clear: if you had not sown this field, and if you had not sown it with this type of grain, then you would never harvest this type of grain from it; and, consequently, your sowing is certainly *the necessary condition* of the future harvest. But if besides your sowing, and independent of it, there were not a fructifying power in nature, then your seeds would never yield fruit. This fructifying power, not your sowing, is the *final sufficient reason* for the harvest. When you are sowing, you rely on this power, this order of nature, in accordance with which you cannot harvest if you have not sown, but in accordance with which, in the orderly course of nature, you may certainly expect a harvest from your sowing. <380> Only through this reliance does your scattering of seed corn become a purposive pursuit that would otherwise be either a purposeless game or a counterproductive expenditure of a very useful thing. You rely on this order with such assurance that, given your faith in it, you actually put at risk kernels that you could use as they are for your own nourishment."

Should my opponent still fail to comprehend you, then explain the point to him a little more rigorously and comprehensibly. Perhaps as follows: "Both the sowing and the harvest are combined within your concept; and both are intended by you—the latter as the *consequence* of the former, and the former only for the sake of the latter. Where, then, is the *connective element*, that is, the element that mediates between the harvest (the consequence) and the sowing (the antecedent)? Does it lie in your act of sowing, that is, in *what you do when you are sowing*, or do you posit it outside of this act? I think that you do indeed posit it outside of yourself, assuming that you have really made my distinction.⁵³ What is *outside of you*, however, is only given impulse and posited in the condition of its activity through something *inside of you*, through your free act."

"Therefore, in your sowing, from which a harvest is supposed to result, you rely on *two things*—on the one hand, that which is purely and solely your product; on the other hand, that which exists completely independently of you, is active, and merely *known* to you, that is, the eternal order of nature—and *you do so in all of your sensible actions*. You can move neither hand nor foot without presupposing, perhaps unconsciously, these two things: your pure, empty willing that absolutely depends on you and moves your hand, and *the laws of the organization and articulation of your body*, in accordance with which your hand's actual motion follows from that willing but will no longer follow as soon as that articulation is injured and, say, your hand is crippled."

⁵³ Fichte means the distinction between the sowing and the harvest.

If you can make this point comprehensible to my opponent, then we have won; and there will be no more of that confusion, repeated *ad nauseam*, which says that the moral order is sufficiently guaranteed by the moral law alone. In what sense is one using the expression “the moral law” in this case? To speak of the law that determines even God’s causal power? Then this proposition cannot be used against my theory. Or to speak of the voice of conscience in a finite being? There is talk—in a doctrine of morals, but not in a theory of religion—of a moral order that can be grounded (not guaranteed) in this fashion. I was speaking of something else. I said, “If you *can* make this comprehensible,” but I fear <381> that you can do so for only a very few; for it is right here that a barrier has been erected for so many people with regard to their concepts. At least I have encountered several who (even if one crushes them in a mortar) are able to understand or comprehend this point only by thinking that *they* move their tongue, their hand, and their foot, and that they do so entirely alone through their own power, without any outside assistance, and in the absence of order and law; and who, presumably, also think that merely scattering seed corn is a sufficient ground for germinating and bearing of fruit.⁵⁴ Nothing more can be done with these people except to request, with every form of politeness, that they no longer converse about what they clearly do not understand, and that they not take this polite request the wrong way. The reason for their incapacity is that nowhere do they notice what is really there and is in fact within their power and forms their own true self, i.e., their will. Consequently, of course, they cannot tally *two things*, cannot distinguish an A and a B, where, *for them*, only a single thing is in fact present, and one, the A, is entirely lacking. Naturally, they are now forced to displace *their personality* (which cannot really be lost to them) into B, into what for us (in this standpoint) is nature; and they *must* firmly and obstinately believe and, through their innermost consciousness, *perceive* (and cannot understand in any other way except) that *they themselves* do what we others know very well we do not do ourselves but rather nature does. One cannot argue with these people. One must educate them if they are still young enough; or if they are not young enough, they must be allowed to die off in the grip of their error.

After giving this first test, which nine-tenths of my opponents will not pass, and which will justly condemn them to eternal silence, question the remaining tenth in the following fashion:

“What is there, then, with respect to morality, that is purely and solely in your power, so that it alone is demanded of you and you alone are responsible for it?” As long as they understand your question, they must answer as follows: “Mere *willing*, as an inner determination of my disposition, and absolutely nothing else.” This is also true of sensible action, but with this difference: in the latter case, a material goal existing apart from willing is intended; in the former

⁵⁴ Fichte is alluding to the biblical passage: “Crush a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his folly will not depart from him” (Proverbs 27: 22).

case, however, the inner purity and righteousness of willing is itself intended. In every sensible pursuit <382> willing is merely the means to some goal that has been willed. It is simply that which first moves and excites what the power of nature then continues, and the determination of the will would not have been decided upon if that goal had not been willed. In its moral determination the will is itself the final goal of willing: it should be constituted in a certain fashion just so that it may be so constituted.

After you have requested their redoubled attention, ask them the following: "Irrespective of the fact that the moral will itself and as such must be the final goal of *our* willing, is it not possible that *something should result* from this willing, but, of course, not by means of our causal power? That is, of course, the good will is what is solely in our power, and is what *we* for our part must attend to, and is what must be the final member *for us*; however, it may well be that the good will *in general* is not the final member (for some other will) and that yet another member is supposed to succeed it (without, of course, our assistance).⁵⁵ Therefore, the actual motion of my hand is indeed supposed to result from willing that my hand move, but certainly not because of the mere power of my will, considered purely in itself, but rather because of a natural arrangement, *in virtue of which* the motion first results from that willing. But I simply would not have generated that willing within myself if I had not been counting on this natural arrangement, in accordance with which it has this result; in this instance I will only for the sake of the result. I will my duty, however, not for the sake of some result, but rather for its own sake; and only to the extent that I will thusly, do I really will my duty. But it could be the case that [willing my] duty would likewise have results in virtue of some order; of course, I cannot will it for these results. For if I willed it for their sake, then I would not be willing [my] duty at all, and the results could not now come to pass. The result of morality for a finite being is necessarily of the sort that it only comes to pass on the condition that it is not actually *willed* (although it is *postulated*), that is, it furnishes no motive for willing."

"If the matter stands something like this"—I asserted this and will immediately speak of the grounds for this assertion—"then how far does *my* power, and the power of *all finite beings*, extend, and where does the domain of a foreign power lying outside of all finite beings begin? My power would doubtless extend only to the determination of the will (=A), but that by means of which this determination of the will would necessarily be connected to a result thereof (=B) would *not* be my power and would lie outside of my power and my being. Now if someone called this law, in accordance with which B necessarily follows A, an "order" or—to contrast it with the order of nature—<383> a "moral" or "intelligible order" (whereby a moral or intelligible *interconnection*

⁵⁵ See Daniel Breazeale's helpful note about Fichte's discussion of the act of willing as the final member of a series of mental acts and the first member of a series of real events, EPW, p. 170–71n.

or *system* or *world* arose), then this person would doubtless not be positing the moral order inside of finite moral beings themselves but rather outside of them and consequently would doubtless be assuming something else besides these beings.”

For the most part these judges have examined the Kantian theory of religion and have not censured that philosopher for atheism. He teaches that happiness proportionate to morality must result from morality; and for him, the ground of this result, the mediating element between happiness and morality, is God. Why, then, were they quite able in Kant’s case to distinguish between what is attributed to finite beings and what is attributed to an alien power *outside of* finite beings, but after I speak, they are no longer able to do so?

My friend, once you have removed the timidity of these judges in this fashion and have encouraged them to lay eyes on this dreadful thing, you will elevate to the level of certainty what has heretofore only been presupposed. <384> Say to your opponent: “If you were merely and solely *will* (and if such a thing could be thought), then you could will in a moral fashion; the matter would be settled, and your essence would be realized. In this way you should also actually *will* duty. But at the same time you are *cognition*; you contemplate and observe yourself, and here in particular you contemplate and observe your moral willing. For you, this willing thereby falls under the *laws* of your objectifying and discursive thinking; it becomes an *event* to you and takes a position in a *series*. It is not that *prior* to this willing there was a previous member that was either theoretically grounding or practically motivating; for in the first case you would not be free, and in the second case your decision would not be morally good. Your will is simply the first instigating member of the series. Instead, there is a second member *after* this willing: that is, your good will has consequences. This consequence that is necessarily added in thought—not what motivates the decision but rather what satisfies cognition—is here called the “goal.” Insofar as I posit you as *willing*, you should, irrespective of any goal, simply obey. But if you *contemplate* this willing of yours, and if it appears to you to be without a goal and without consequences, then it will appear irrational to you, and what this willing commands will simultaneously appear irrational to you. Perhaps it even really appears to you to be this way, and for this reason you disavow this command and (as an eudaemonist) seek out the empirical determinative grounds of a material willing. But, if this is so, then you are neither participating in this discussion nor can you enter into it, and we are neither speaking about you nor with you; you are dismissed. But as certainly as you believe this command and decide to obey it, then just as certainly you do not regard it as irrational, that is, do not regard your obedience to be without a goal and without consequences. In your thinking—without, of course, making a voluntary decision, but because you are necessitated by the laws of thought—you add a consequence to [willing] morality; and so does absolutely every human being who merely elevates himself to a moral disposition, perhaps without ever becoming conscious of this and without giving himself an account of the interconnection of his thinking. But

whoever does not believe this command (because he has not decided to obey it) also does not believe what follows from it. Instead, he rather thoughtlessly repeats the religion of his country, which he has learned by heart, and is unable to understand an uncompromising theory of religion, which he slanders and runs down as atheism." I carefully analyzed this important point on pp. 10–12, in order to counter a number <385> of erroneous, fashionable opinions about belief that regard it as if it were a remedy for lazy and despondent reason, opinions that are at work in the very essay mine was written to correct; and I have neither earned nor occasioned the mendacious distortions, which, for example, Mr. *Heusinger* calls to account with what he has said.***

<386> Now, for me, the *position* of religious belief is this: this necessary way of thinking and demanding an intelligible order, law, arrangement (or <387> however it might be described), in accordance with which true morality (the inner purity of the heart) necessarily has consequences. It is, I maintain, out of this necessary way of thinking—if a freely produced moral disposition is presupposed—that all belief in a God and in a divine realm is developed and has always developed in the minds of all good people; and their belief is nothing other than belief in that order, the concept of which they have merely *further developed and determined*, doing so unconsciously while also being urged on by the instruction they received from society. Only after this further development did they find this concept in their consciousness, and since then they have never again traced it back to its original simplicity, which, after all, only the philosopher and the educator need. <388> In short, in all human action we rely on *two things*: something that depends on man himself (the determination of his will) and something that does not depend on him. In the case of sensible action, the latter is the *order of nature*, and anyone who merely acts sensibly need rely on nothing else, and he has nothing else to rely on if he is consistent. In the case of moral action, i.e., the case of a purely good will, the latter is an *intelligible order*.

Every belief in a divine realm that *contains more* than this concept of a moral order is to that extent fiction and superstition, a belief that may be *harmless* but is always *unworthy* of a rational being and highly *suspicious*. Every belief that contradicts this concept of a moral order (belief that intends to introduce, by senseless and magical means, an *amoral confusion* or a lawless capriciousness that exists through a being of overwhelming strength) is an *objectionable* superstition that *leads human beings to their utter ruin*.

I treat of this point, which is solely a matter of *deduction*, only when I encounter a philosopher, and indeed only when I encounter the type that I consider a *transcendental* philosopher. Heaven grant me that I might only have to deal with such philosophers, that others might finally come to understand what a deduction is in my sense of the term, and that they might come to understand that the essence of *my* philosophy (and in my view the essence of *all* real philosophy) lies solely in deducing! Here I have nothing whatsoever to do with the believer in popular religion and his guardians, the church and the state; such a believer *possesses* faith without asking for much of a deduction of it. And

the concept of an *intelligible moral order*, in its philosophical purity, simplicity, and precision, is not to be attributed to him, either. There is no doubt, however, that all of what he believes *can* be traced back to that concept (perhaps by his religious instructor or by another philosopher). The believer in popular religion will first become aware of his interest and will maintain his conviction along with our principles when we *further determine* and *develop* the latter. I did not do this in that essay of mine and did not take it to be my next goal to pursue. Consequently, the only ones who should have been talking about my essay are those who have some ground for regarding themselves as transcendental philosophers; and, as is well known, their number in Germany is not yet as great as the number of those who have actually spoken up and contributed to the *outcry*. Pursuing this development and derivation, even within my soul, is <389> a delicate pursuit, as previous experience shows. My opponents have never wanted it to work out successfully, and it will not succeed anytime soon. For even if they understood my premises—which, at least in this instance, has not been the case—a long time would still have to pass for them to master my synthetic method. They may be able just to continue making inferences, but that is not what is needed here.

At present, I have most fully carried out this development in my *Vocation of Man*, which you will probably receive shortly after this letter.⁵⁶ But I almost prefer to speak with you, where I may freely speak from the heart, rather than with the vast, far-flung public. Be prepared, therefore, in the coming days to receive in the mail an effort to develop this fundamental concept (which will be written in my epistolary manner), that is, an investigation into the following question: *what*, then, is the consequence of morality, and *how* should it come about?

Endnotes

* <375> The scorn and discontent aroused against the one-sole-philosophy philosophers, which one cannot avoid hearing even now, also belongs among these formal absurdities. — Tell me, you honest man, whom I intend to engage in a conversation, when you step forward, unbidden and in front of everyone, and make an assertion, in what sense do you do this? Perhaps in the sense that you for your part, you Caius, are of this inconclusive opinion? If so, then you ought to have remained silent, for of all the uninteresting things the least interesting is the inconclusive opinion of some particular individual; and it is incomparable arrogance on your part to presuppose that we would be curious to hear which opinion it is that you, you Caius, hold. Who, then, are you? Who, Caius, are you? If you should have the honor of speaking, then you must intend to expound on a pronouncement of universal reason but not on a pronouncement of your own; and with all your inner dignity and morality you must be able to vouch for the fact that in the moment that you speak, you are fervently convinced of the absolute

⁵⁶ VM was published soon after “From a Private Letter” in January of 1800.

universal validity of your assertion. As long as you cannot do this, nothing compels you to open your mouth. As certainly, however, as you assume the former, you must also assume — there is no way out of this — you must assume that everyone who has asserted something different from you since the beginning of the world, and everyone who will assert something different until the end of the world, is simply incorrect, and that you and those who agree with you are alone correct. All of humanity should and must tolerate this until they have refuted you. — When you speak, you must needs know absolutely nothing but that you alone are correct; otherwise, <376> you ought not to have spoken. That your own mature reflection or the reproof of others may teach you better in the future remains an option for you. If this should happen, then you will retract your initial assertion and be as honest as before.

Not only philosophy but all science is essentially one-sole-science science. Every philosopher is necessarily a one-sole-philosophy philosopher, for if he is not one, then he is mistaken and is not a philosopher at all. And where the one-sole ends, philosophy and all science end as well, and darkness, illusion, and empty babble begin. — Why, then, does one not heap scorn on the one-sole-mathematics mathematician, who is the most intolerant of scholars? Just go up to one and say, "It is surely presumptuous to maintain that one can never find a right triangle the sum of whose angles is greater or less than two right angles." You will see how he turns round and leaves you standing there alone.

I hereby earnestly ask these fault-finders what we should do in order to escape their censure. Should we really hurry to market with our well-intentioned notions while hoping for the best? Or should we, when we really possess an inner conviction of the universal validity of our assertions, only outwardly act as if we intended to opine about what we actually purport to know, thereby becoming liars and hypocrites in our own eyes and showing society as a whole that we are ridiculous dilettantes who imagine that individual opinion means something? And we should do this so that it does not seem as if we wanted to be more correct than those who are incorrect? If they are not able to answer my questions with anything reasonable, then I entreat them to refrain completely from making such remarks henceforth.

There is indeed great variety among human beings! Thus in a pamphlet directed against me, the bookseller Dyck — who is also a German philosopher and an opponent of the *Wissenschaftslehre* — recently expressed astonishment over how someone can say of his own doctrine that it is true. By way of contrast, I would wonder at someone who was teaching what he believed but said that it is not true. (Note added by the author upon publication.) {Editor's Comment: Johann Gottfried Dyck (1750–1813), a poet and publisher in Leipzig, wrote *Ueber des Herrn Professor Fichte Appellation an das Publikum. Eine Anmerkung aus der deutschen Uebersetzung des Ersten Bandes von Saint-Lamberts Tugendkunst besonders abgedruckt* (Leipzig, 1799) wherein he asks "Kann jemand ohne Vermessenheit selbst bestimmen, seine Lehre sey Wahrheit?" ["Can anyone without presumption decide for himself that his doctrine is the truth?"] (p. 6).}

** <378> Mr. *Eberhard* says, however, that in order to know the relations of a thing to me I must first have a concept (presumably of the inner nature of this thing). Consequently, according to him, it seems that the relations are only *inferred*, and thus are only *thought*, but are by no means *sensed*; and so I entreat him to reflect once more on the example that he himself has adduced against me.

I say, in contrast, that I first obtain a concept through the cognition of the relations to me; and the concept is always nothing but the relations themselves as they are

aggregated by thinking, which is completely different from their being *cognized* by mere thinking. — It may well happen that some occasion leads me to *renew* within my consciousness this concept that was once produced within me (and *in this act* I thus come upon this concept as something ready-made); that I *develop* this concept; and that *this time*, through mere thinking and without any real, immediate perception, I place special emphasis upon a single characteristic contained within this concept; and so forth. Mr. Eberhard's philosophy seems to reflect exclusively on this process of analysis, and I agree with everything that he says about this act. But my philosophy does not concern itself with this act in any way. Instead, it poses a higher question: how did that concept itself, the one that you came upon, first arise, and how did that characteristic, the one that you are currently developing out of that concept, first enter into it? — And Mr. Eberhard needs to discuss the *original genesis* of this concept. In my opinion, to say that it is (as a concept) innate is to make a mere *assertion* in order to avoid an unwelcome question; by no means, however, is this to provide an *explanation* and still less is it to offer a *proof*. — I hope in what follows to make clearer to him than I have managed up to now how, *in my view*, the concept of God is originally produced. (Note added by the author upon publication.) {Editor's Comment: Johann August Eberhard (1739–1809), a follower of Leibnizian-Wolffian rationalism at University of Halle, made this claim in *Ueber den Gott des Herrn Professor Fichte und den Götzen seiner Gegner* (Halle, 1799), p. 21.}

*** <385> In order to express the necessary consistency of both thoughts, I say (p. 10): “*If I do not wish to deny my own being, I must intend the accomplishment of that goal (of morality).*” This proposition has to be analyzed, and so I repeat it on the following page, *in an abbreviated manner*, omitting the features that require no analysis: “I must simply intend the goal of morality. *This means, etc.*” Accordingly, such talk is like the following: “In a *right triangle* the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the square of both legs. In a *triangle* the square of the hypotenuse, etc. This means, etc.” — Mr. Heusinger, however, clings to the final expression of this proposition as if it were the *direct* one. He explains my entire theory on the basis of this unconditionally posited “must” in order to accuse me of fatalism (even though anyone who has read only one syllable of mine must know that my thought in its entirety is built upon the freedom of the will) and in order to expound quite clearly how, in my view, the moral order <386> *creates itself* and how I am well aware of the fact that I am an obvious atheist. — In ordinary life every honorable person calls such behavior “villainy,” “roguery,” and “mendacity.” What should one call it in the literary realm?

A reviewer in the Erlangen *Literatur-Zeitung*, who, with contempt for all possible morals, has preached good morals to me for a long time, now steps forward and praises <387> Heusinger's shoddy effort as a highly important work. He solemnly beseeches me to refute this work thoroughly but does not show the least annoyance at this falsification; instead, he reports it to the reader with complete confidence. — Furthermore, this same Heusinger imagines nothing short of finishing off the entire system of the *Wissenschaftslehre* with a single blow; for he assures us that the I on which this system builds is not to be found in his consciousness: it is a psychological delusion. Psychology teaches the facts of consciousness; the *Wissenschaftslehre* talks about what one finds to be the case only when one discovers oneself! — I assure both Mr. Heusinger and his immature reviewer that they could quite happily shed their real and imagined wisdom if they only knew *what this system is actually talking about*. (Note added by the author upon publication.) {Editor's Comment: Fichte is referring the hostile pamphlet *Ueber*

das idealistisch-atheistische System des Herrn Profeßor Fichte in Jena (Dresden und Gotha, 1799), which was written by Johann Heinrich Gottlieb Heusinger (1766–1837), a professor at the University of Jena between 1795 and 1797. Heusinger implied that Fichte described human beings as mere machines of the moral law. The anonymous review of Heusinger's pamphlet to which Fichte also refers appeared in the Erlangen *Literatur-Zeitung* (December 2, 1799), Columns 1907–1910.}

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Chapter 11

J. G. Fichte: “Concluding Remark by the Editor”

Commentary

J. G. Fichte’s “From a Private Letter” and *Vocation of Man* both appeared in January 1800.¹ In September 1800, after Fichte had settled in Berlin, he published “Concluding Remark by the Editor” in the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten*.² In this brief comment, Fichte reiterates a position that he introduced in “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” the distinction between ordinary and philosophical proofs; he revisits one of the subjects addressed in “From a Private Letter” and in the *Vocation of Man*, the distinction between the standpoint of philosophy and the standpoint of life; and he resumes discussion of another subject touched on in “From a Private Letter,” the distinctions between philosophy, religion, theology, and ministry.³ In

¹ “From a Private Letter,” pp. 252–67 (GA, I, 6, pp. 358–90) and VM (GA, I, 6, pp. 181–309). Fichte emigrated to Berlin permanently in March 1800.

² “Concluding Remark by the Editor” (pp. 276–81 [GA, I, 6, pp. 411–16]) was originally published in the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten* Vol. X, No. 3 (September, 1800), pp. 245–60. Although this issue of the *Philosophisches Journal* was published in 1800, it was supposed to appear in 1798. The earlier confiscations of the journal and the circumstances of the atheism dispute interfered with the scheduled publications of the journal. There are various notes that Fichte seems to have added after 1798 insofar as those notes address criticisms that arose after that time. “Concluding Remark by the Editor” was appended to another essay by the doctoral candidate Ritter (his first name is not known), “Streit des Idealismus und Realismus in der Theologie” [“The Struggle between Idealism and Realism in Theology”] (*Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten*, Vol. X, No. 3, September, 1800: pp. 213–245). Ritter’s essay was a critique of another essay, “Theoretisch-praktischer Beweis des objectiven Daseyns Gottes” [“Theoretical-Practical Proof of God’s Objective Existence”] (*Neuest theologisches Journal*, Vol. I, No. 1, 1799: pp. 19–34), by Paul Joachim Siegmund Vogel (1753–1834), a theology professor in Altdorf. This latter essay had been accompanied by Vogel’s “Prinzipien der kritischen Philosophie” [“Principles of Critical Philosophy”] (*Neuest theologisches Journal*, Vol. I, No. 1, 1799: pp. 109–54). For more details about the publication of “Concluding Remark by the Editor” see the remarks by the editors of GA in GA, I, 6, pp. 392–396.

³ “Concluding Remark by the Editor,” pp. 276–81 (GA, I, 6, pp. 411–16); “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 21–29 (GA, I, 5, pp. 347–57);

many a sense “Concluding Remark by the Editor” provides a very early foyer into Fichte’s later work on the philosophy of religion, the lectures on *Way to the Blessed Life: Or also, the Religionslehre* (1806), because it asserts the parameters of transcendental proof, philosophy, religion, theology, and religious ministry.⁴

In “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” Fichte had argued that a transcendental derivation of religious belief is not an objective proof of God’s existence, that the concept of the supersensible world is not philosophically derivable from the concept of the sensible world, and that the truth of philosophical first principles is not logically demonstrable.⁵ Fichte’s “Concluding Remark” buttresses those arguments. A proof, in the mundane, objective or empirical sense, is a demonstration of some concept or existence.⁶ For example, an objective proof might show that some concept or proposition is mediately true because it is logically implied by some other concept or proposition that we have assumed as true.⁷ Likewise, an objective proof might show that something exists contingently because it is causally implied by some other thing that we have assumed as existing.⁸ Ultimately, proofs of mediate concepts and contingent existences, which are used to demonstrate the theoretical truth of claims about objective, or empirical, consciousness, must be based on some immediate, necessary foundation or they are groundless.

Transcendental philosophy provides objective, mediate, and contingent consciousness with a subjective, immediate, and necessary foundation by showing that it is based on subjective consciousness, or intellectual intuition. A proof, in the transcendental or philosophical sense, is a derivation or genetic explanation of some specific aspect of consciousness, which is presupposed as present because it has already been intuited.⁹ A transcendental derivation, or genetic explanation, does not prove that this aspect of consciousness is true or exists but rather demonstrates how it is related to other aspects of consciousness.¹⁰ For example, a transcendental

“From a Private Letter,” pp. 252–67 (GA, I, 6, pp. 369–89); and VM (GA, I, 6, pp. 181–309).

⁴ ASL.

⁵ “On the Ground of Our Belief in a Divine World-Governance,” pp. 21–23 (GA, I, 5, pp. 348–50).

⁶ “Concluding Remark by the Editor,” p. 276 (GA, I, 6, p. 411). The term “objective” or “empirical proof” here is not used in reference to scientific or inductive proofs but rather to contrast all ordinary proofs, including the scientific and inductive, with transcendental proofs.

⁷ For example, if all men are mortal and Socrates is a man, then Socrates is mortal. Of course, such proofs are only interesting and useful if we know that men *are* mortal or that Socrates *is* a man.

⁸ For example, where there is smoke, there is fire.

⁹ “Concluding Remark,” p. 276, GA, I, 6, pp. 411–12. Philosophical proof does not demonstrate existence. See “From a Private Letter,” pp. 257–58 (GA, I, 6, p. 377).

¹⁰ “Concluding Remark,” pp. 277–78 (GA, I, 6, p. 413).

proof might show that consciousness of objects is connected to consciousness of willing or that consciousness of freedom is connected to consciousness of the moral law; but it would not attempt to show that objects and willing exist or that freedom and morality are true. Ultimately, transcendental philosophy must relate every aspect of objective consciousness to the single subjective ground of intellectual intuition, which occurs in life as a real immediate consciousness of the moral law and concomitant practical certainty of freedom and a moral world order.

There is neither a non-trivial proof for the truth of religion nor an objective proof for the existence of God. Any attempt to demonstrate either the truth of religion or the existence of God reverses the priority of practical immediacy, by making theoretical, mediate contingency a ground for practical, immediate certainty.¹¹ Moreover, any attempt to demonstrate the existence of God by appealing to the nature or existence of the sensible world applies sensible concepts, such as causality, to the supersensible world (by conceiving God as creator), or attributes supersensible concepts, such as purposiveness, to the sensible world (by conceiving the world as teleological). Causality cannot be used to explain the supersensible world, because causality is one of the sensible concepts derived from intellectual intuition within transcendental philosophy. Teleology cannot be used to describe the sensible world because purposiveness is one of the supersensible concepts discovered through real intellectual intuition in life.¹² Neither objective nor transcendental proof can demonstrate the reality of the sensible and intellectual intuitions that arise within life; but at the standpoint of life, objective proof can be used to demonstrate the mediate concepts and existences that those intuitions ground; and at the standpoint of philosophy, transcendental derivation can be used to demonstrate how those intuitions discovered in life are interconnected.¹³

In "From a Private Letter" and the *Vocation of Man*, Fichte addressed the distinction between philosophy and life.¹⁴ He returns to this discussion in "Concluding Remark." According to Fichte, the human being at the standpoint of

¹¹ "Concluding Remark," pp. 276–77 (GA, I, 6, pp. 412–13).

¹² "Concluding Remark," pp. 276–78 (GA, I, 6, pp. 412–14).

¹³ Both philosophy and life employ logic, because logical proof simply shows that one concept, which is already presumed by life or philosophy, implies another. See WLNK, pp. 471–72 (WLNK [K], p. 243). There is another form of elucidation that occurs at the standpoint of life, which involves explicating implicit features of a concept someone already possesses. Fichte calls this form of illumination popular dogmatics or instructional guidance. For example, a "tutor or teacher" might show his student that he regards the sensible world as purposive (and as created by a rational God) only because he is already aware of himself as purposive (and as part of a supersensible world governed by a moral world-order). This type of explanation is not a transcendental or philosophical proof, but it can be useful in assisting the non-philosopher to understand transcendental or philosophical concepts ("Concluding Remark," pp. 278–79 [GA, I, 6, p. 414]).

¹⁴ "From a Private Letter," pp. 257–58 (GA, I, 6, pp. 377–78).

life presupposes concepts about the sensible and supersensible worlds that arise as basic beliefs within life. The human being, as a knowing subject, employs logical and empirical principles that allow for theoretical proofs of truth and existence.¹⁵ The human being, as a moral subject, employs moral and religious principles that allow for practical guides to ethical activity and religious devotion.¹⁶ According to Fichte, the transcendental philosopher at the standpoint of philosophy abstracts from life as a whole and reflects on the fundamental belief of life, which is the real intellectual intuition of the moral law and concomitant belief in freedom and the moral world order. The philosopher employs intuitions that arise in thought itself, specifically the philosophical intellectual intuition, and principles that govern thought itself, specifically the principle of determinability, to account for consciousness by explaining how the sensible and supersensible concepts and the empirical, moral, and religious principles of life are connected to that intellectual intuition.¹⁷ Ultimately, the real intellectual intuition encountered in life provides an extra-philosophical sanction for the philosophical intellectual intuition and the philosopher's explanation of consciousness. The distinction between philosophy and life determines the appropriate territories of objective and transcendental proofs as well as the appropriate territories of *Religionslehre*, theology, religious ministry, and religion.

In "From a Private Letter" Fichte outlined the boundaries of the distinctions between transcendental *Religionslehre*, theology, religious ministry, and religion.¹⁸ "Concluding Remark" reiterates these borders. Philosophy of religion, or *Religionslehre*, occupies the standpoint of philosophy whereas theology, religious ministry, and religion occupy the standpoint of life.¹⁹ Legitimate *Religionslehre* addresses religion at the standpoint of life, showing specifically how religious concepts and principles arise in life, or how they are connected to the fundamental belief of life, which is belief in a moral world order. Legitimate theology addresses religion at the standpoint of life, dealing with "the *scholarly*, merely historical, question of where the religious documents existing among us come from and what their authors actually wanted to say, or with the *practical* question of what therein

¹⁵ A knowing subject thinks.

¹⁶ A moral subject acts. A human being thinks and acts. Its thinking and acting are mutually dependent.

¹⁷ "Concluding Remark," pp. 276 and 278–79 (GA, I, 6, pp. 411 and 414–15). The philosophical intellectual intuition is the philosopher's nonsensible, immediate recognition that I-hood and self-reverting activity are identical, which the philosopher observes when he abstracts from life. The principle of determinability is the law of thought that stipulates something specific (or determinate) must be conceived in contrast to something general (or determinable), which the philosopher observes when he reflects on his activity.

¹⁸ "From a Private Letter," pp. 257–58 (GA, I, 6, pp. 377–79).

¹⁹ "Concluding Remark," pp. 279–80 (GA, I, 6, pp. 415–16). Compare "From a Private Letter," pp. 263–64 (GA, I, 6, p. 388).

conduces to the teaching, judgment, betterment, and cultivation of righteousness."²⁰ Religious ministry addresses man as a religious subject at the standpoint of life, assisting him in comprehending the implicit meaning of his religious beliefs and in applying those implications to his practical activity. Provided that these disciplines and practices remain within their own borders, they cannot conflict.

In "Concluding Remark," Fichte expresses the hope that philosophers, theologians, and ministers can agree to his proposed "boundary settlement and that hereafter everyone will take care of his own house, where there will doubtless always be enough going on so that everyone will find something to do."²¹ The treaty is fair enough, but one question remains: How should the philosopher—from his summit at the standpoint of philosophy—address the ordinary human being—in his valley at the standpoint of life—if that human being *wants* or needs a philosophical account of consciousness, including a philosophical account of religious consciousness? Might the non-philosopher ever *need* transcendental philosophy; or is *Wissenschaftslehre* merely a cerebral gymnastic for exercising the idealist's preternatural knowledge drive? According to Fichte, everyone need not engage in philosophical reflection, but some people *must*. In the *Vocation of Man*, Fichte draws a poignant image of such a person: an ordinary human being in a state of profound distress over the seeming conflict between his heart and head at the standpoint of life. This person—one whose inquiries and studies have led him to suspect that faith, morality, and knowledge are irreconcilable—urgently *requires* the *Wissenschaftslehre*. However, as a non-philosopher, he lacks speculative experience or expertise, so he also needs help ascending from life to philosophy. In the *Vocation of Man*, a vociferous "spirit" of philosophy assists the distraught non-philosopher from the standpoint of life to the standpoint of philosophy and then, leads him back to his starting point.²² In Fichte's lectures on the *Way to the Blessed Life: or also, the Religionslehre*, the spirited "voice" of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte himself, provides his audience with a stairway from life to philosophy by offering a popular presentation of transcendental idealism.

²⁰ "Concluding Remark," pp. 279–80 (GA, I, 6, pp. 415–16). There is a sort of *dogmatic* theology or *theological* philosophy which attempts to use empirical proofs to demonstrate the existence of God—or, for that matter, the non-existence of God—or to expound on the nature of God considered in-himself and apart from any relation to human beings; but this sort of misguided theology or philosophy of religion is anathema to both legitimate theology and transcendental *Religionslehre* ("Concluding Remark," pp. 278–79 [GA, I, 6, p. 414]). Compare "From a Private Letter," pp. 257–58 (GA, I, 6, pp. 377–78). The proof by Vogel is an example of dogmatic theology. Another example of a dogmatic theologian is Johann August Eberhard (1739–1809), a follower of Leibnizian-Wolffian rationalism at the University of Halle, who claimed that one must first have a concept of God before understanding God's relation to man in *Ueber den Gott des Herrn Professor Fichte und den Götzen seiner Gegner* (Halle: 1799), p. 21.

²¹ "Concluding Remark," p. 280 (GA, I, 6, p. 416).

²² VM (GA, I, 6, pp. 183–309) is written as a dialogue between the latent philosopher and the philosophical spirit.

A popular presentation of philosophy commences precisely where the minister's activity ends, and gets hold of man precisely where the theologian leaves him behind, because it approaches man at the standpoint of life by raising certain concepts "which are already presupposed as present, to distinct consciousness, to develop and bring them to life."²³ The *Way to the Blessed Life* contains a popular presentation of a practical guide to blessedness, a *Seligkeitslehre*, because it teaches the way to beatitude.²⁴ This exposition is practical insofar as it speaks to the non-philosopher at the standpoint of life. Moreover, the *Way to the Blessed Life* offers a popular presentation of Fichte's transcendental *Religionslehre*. This exposition is transcendental insofar as it relates God to human consciousness. Finally, the *Way to the Blessed Life* provides a popular presentation of the essential argument of the *Wissenschaftslehre* that subjective consciousness grounds objective consciousness.²⁵ These three expositions are popular presentations, because Fichte illustrates philosophical conclusions without transcendental proof and thus, without deriving or demonstrating anything, leads his audience to appreciate philosophical conclusions that he has already demonstrated to himself through transcendental proofs.²⁶

In Fichte's popular presentation of the practical guide to blessedness in the *Way to the Blessed Life*, Fichte claims that human life consists in the original duality of the self-conscious individual, who has a fundamental interest or love that compels him to strive for unity of his finite consciousness with the eternal, or God. True human life, love, and beatitude are the same; but immature human beings are initially unconscious of their true interest and thus, moral despair drives them through progressive stages of consciousness.²⁷ By following the development of consciousness through these different stages or levels of awareness—sensibility, legality, morality, religion, and philosophy—Fichte leads his audience from the standpoint of life to the standpoint of philosophy. Once the audience has arrived at this standpoint, Fichte provides a popular presentation of the principles of the *Religionslehre* and *Wissenschaftslehre*, culminating with a presentation of the five-fold synthesis of the individual rational will, the social realm of rational being, the particular material body, and the natural world of material objects, which are

²³ "Theology, for its part, commences precisely where the philosopher's activity ends, and it gets hold of man precisely where the philosopher leaves him behind" ("Concluding Remark," p. 279 [GA, I, 6, p. 414]). A popular presentation thus commences with what Fichte calls a popular dogmatic or instructional guide. It is not a complete transcendental proof, but it can lead the listener or reader to a standpoint at which he can follow a condensed and simplified transcendental proof.

²⁴ ASL.

²⁵ ASL, p. 83. Compare VM, p. 99 (GA, I, 6, pp. 284–85).

²⁶ For a discussion of the distinction between a popular and a philosophical exposition of truth, see ASL, pp. 32–33. Compare VM, pp. 1–2 (GA, I, 6, pp. 189–90).

²⁷ ASL, p. 12 and 151. Compare "Only in love is there life" (VM, pp. 24–25 [GA, I, 6, pp. 211–13]). See also ASL, p. 144 and VM, p. 90 (GA, I, 6, p. 277).

united by an intellectual intuition of freedom (and concomitant belief in God) initiated by a summons from one rational being to another that instantiates the moral law.²⁸

Although Fichte's lectures on the *Way to the Blessed Life* were given long after the atheism dispute ended, his "Concluding Remark" opens the door to his last presentation of the *Religionslehre*. Indeed, if we take Fichte at his word, the writings from the atheism dispute provide an inchoate, unripened *Religionslehre*, which reappears as the developed, ripened the *Way to the Blessed Life* of which Fichte says:

These lectures [...] are entirely the result of my unremitting development—during the past six or seven years of more leisure and greater maturity—of a philosophical view that came to me thirteen years ago. Although I hope a good many things might have changed in me, no part of this view itself has changed since that time.²⁹

If we take Fichte at his word, the atheism dispute represents but a brief early moment in the life of Fichte's continuous *Religionslehre*, a rough patch in the development of a unified *Wissenschaftslehre*. Moreover, the atheism dispute does not signify Fichte's utmost failure, but as he often described it, his supreme test. However devastating the impact of the conflict on Fichte's professional career and personal life, his philosophy endured the crisis; and thus, the *Wissenschaftslehre* and its author developed and matured but never surrendered Fichte's fundamental commitment to the intellectual intuition of freedom and all that it entails.

²⁸ The five-fold synthesis is simply a postulate or hypothesis of a philosophical intellectual intuition, which appears as a fact, or real intellectual intuition, at the standpoint of life when we become aware of the moral law because other human beings use sensible gestures to affect our sensible bodies and thereby, to solicit our deference to their intelligible wills.

²⁹ ASL, p. 3. Compare "Private Letter," pp. 252–53 (GA, I, 6, pp. 369–70).

Text: “Concluding Remark by the Editor”

<GA, I, 6, p. 411>

We have allowed the author of the preceding essay to judge, in accordance with his own point of view, the allegedly novel proof of the existence of God submitted by Dr. Vogel. (That is how the proof first became known to the author of this remark.) We find that his judgment completely suffices for such a proof. However, in order not to leave our readers thinking that this is the strongest objection to be made against this type of proof, and that this argument may perhaps be open to some small improvement, we consider it useful to append the following.

First of all, just what is the word “proof” supposed to mean here? For what purpose is Mr. Vogel seeking a proof of God’s objective existence? And what actually does his proof intend to accomplish? If he is trying, as would seem likely from the content of his essay, to demonstrate belief in God’s existence to human beings and to introduce the concept of God into their understanding, then the editor takes it to have been shown long ago that such a proof is superfluous and impossible, comes too late, and will certainly fail in every respect to attain its goal (wherever argumentation could be required).³⁰ Suppose that some conceptual wizard shows up and persuades us that we posit bodies in space or assume the existence of bodies outside of us, and the like. Whoever needs a proof of the former, i.e., a proof of God’s existence, more than he needs a proof of the latter, cannot have the former demonstrated to him. Belief in God is a living and life-giving principle in mankind and proceeds from life itself, not from dead concepts.

<412> Or, if the word “proof” is supposed to mean what it must mean in every legitimate philosophy—that is, a deduction, a genetic explanation (drawn from the system of reason in general) of a determinate consciousness that is presupposed as being present already—then it can very easily be shown that the deduction provided by Dr. Vogel is full of sophisms, devious maneuvers, and sudden transitions. I begin my examination by freeing the proof of all the foreign elements mixed therein but not belonging to it. I also examine another obvious error in the premises, the repudiation of which will take me further than Mr. Vogel will probably wish to follow.

“It is absolutely necessary for human reason to regard *the earth* in its entirety as an effect and to derive it from a cause,” says Mr. Vogel, according to the preceding essay.³¹ Granted! (But only after we have set aside his lamentable error and understood the words as they should doubtless be understood.)³²

³⁰ Fichte is writing in his capacity as the co-editor of the *Philosophisches Journal*.

³¹ Ritter, “Streit des Idealismus und Realismus in der Theologie,” p. 219.

³² Fichte means Vogel’s “lamentable error” of inferring a supersensible, or intelligible cause, from a sensible effect. That the earth must be regarded as an effect should be understood to mean that the earth is treated as a sensible effect insofar as it is considered empirically as a part of a causally governed sensible universe.

Consequently—what does my reader think?—must I also assume that there are forces *outside of the earth* (and without a doubt, *homogenous* forces) that have produced and determined the earth? In short, must I assume that the earth is not the universe itself but rather only a part of it? (It has never appeared otherwise even to my sensible perception.) Should I think that this is so? "No," says Dr. Vogel. "Consequently, I must assume a *creator* of the earth."³³ Therefore, by means of a most peculiar transformation, the *cause* in the major premise appears as a *creator* in the conclusion!

Indeed, Mr. Vogel ascends to the universe later on and derives its creator in particular. But I do not comprehend why he was not at once satisfied with his first successful Q.E.D. [*Quod erat demonstrandum* (thus it is proven)]; and I do not comprehend why, if he himself did not trust in this Q.E.D., he did not venture forward with his second decisive attempt at the very beginning.³⁴

Let Mr. Vogel demonstrate in only a single instance—be it of the earth or of the universe—the possibility that original reason (i.e., reason that systematically constructs its consciousness) makes its μεταβασιν εις άλλο γενοϛ [transference to another domain] and ascends from sensible and material effects to an intelligent cause that is entirely opposed to them! <413> Just let him show precisely the point where original reason unites what is absolutely and contradictorily opposed! This is all that matters, and everything else is beside the point. But no one expects me to enlarge on the subject any further. What Mr. Vogel has overlooked here belongs to the first principles of the critical philosophy and can be read in thirty books. If, on the occasion of his reported departure from the critical philosophy, he resolved to acquaint himself with it, then he would find that reason, in thinking about a cause of the world, only arrives at a self-organizing power of nature that is generally distributed throughout the universe, that is, a *world-soul*.³⁵ But by no means does reason arrive at what the doctrine of religion calls *God*. And if (supposing the impossible) man was in no way a moral being but rather a being solely capable of cognizing nature (all the proofs that attempt what is being examined here presuppose understanding man solely as the latter), he would find that the concept of God would simply not arise in his soul. Mr. Vogel would find that the *purposiveness* in the sensible world (which later on plays a role in that wonderfully constructed proof of his) exists for man only to the extent and

³³ Ritter, "Streit des Idealismus un Realismus in der Theologie," p. 219.

³⁴ Fichte means that if Vogel intended to prove God's existence in this fashion he ought to have started immediately with his proof that the existence of the entire universe—and not merely of the earth—presumed a creator.

³⁵ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854), Fichte's erstwhile follower and Professor of Philosophy at the University of Jena, employed the notion of a world-soul [*Welt-Seele*] in his *Naturphilosophie* [natural philosophy or philosophy of science]. See particularly, *Von der Weltseele, eine Hypothese der höheren Physik zur Erklärung des allgemeinen Organismus* [On the World Soul: A Hypothesis of Higher Physics for the Clarification of Universal Organicity] (Hamburg: Perthes, 1798).

for the reason that man can posit *goals* for himself, and that man can do this solely because an absolute *final goal* (that of morality) is given to him by reason. Furthermore, Mr. Vogel would find that in consequence of this positing of a goal man is obliged to postulate an intelligible order (in which mere pure will can be a cause) as well as an intelligent, holy, and omnipotent principle of such an order. Here and here alone is the *original source* of belief in God; by no means, however, does it originate in concepts drawn from the sensible world.

There is no steady progression from the sensible to the supersensible. The latter must exist in us innately; it is by no means inferred and acquired. But doubtless there is a manner of descending from the supersensible to the sensible as well as a certain view that sees the latter in light of the former. Therefore, the view of the sensible world that sees it as a purposive arrangement already presupposes belief in a rational creator (even without being distinctly conscious that it does so); it is hardly the case that this view is what first grounds this belief. The philosopher should concern himself with the systematic arrangement of the concepts found within reason. He plies his trade solely in order to grasp this arrangement; and he cannot allow this order to be disturbed by the other university faculties and let everything be turned upside down.

Another [manner of descending from the supersensible to the sensible] is the way that one must take in order to raise certain concepts, which are already presupposed as present, to distinct consciousness, to develop and bring them to life; *and this way runs for the most part in a direction opposed to the course of transcendental deduction.* <414> Therefore, it is true (and philosophically demonstrable) that the assumption of purposiveness (and not mere *regularity*) in nature presupposes the assumption of a rational creator of nature. It is not only possible but even probable that, chronologically speaking, a real individual would become aware of and apprehend the first assumption sooner than the latter one. This individual's tutor or teacher would take over and (by drawing on his belief in the purposiveness in the world) demonstrate to him—exactly what? That there is a rational creator of the world? Would this tutor or teacher instill the latter concept into this individual's understanding as a consequence of the former concept? Not at all. Instead, he would only convince this individual that in his initial admission he himself had already admitted and assumed the latter. The development of finished concepts and the tracing of their elements backwards and forwards (as found in popular dogmatics and instructional guides for tutors and teachers) may also, for all we care, be called “proofs”; but no one may make use of them to dispute an actual proof, i.e., a transcendental deduction, for they are badly suited to that end.

By the way, the editor of the *Theological Journal*, Dr. Gabler, is quite right to bar idealism—transcendental, I presume—from any access to his journal.³⁶ For

³⁶ Johann Phillip Gabler (1753–1826) was the editor of the *Neuest theologisches Journal*. See Gabler's “Vorbericht” [“Preliminary Remark”] (*Neuest theologisches Journal* Vol. I, No. 2, pp. 1–18).

insofar as this journal remains a purely theological one (and thus can only concern itself either with the *scholarly*, merely historical, question of where the religious documents existing among us come from and what their authors actually wanted to say, or with the *practical* question of what therein conduces to the teaching, judgment, betterment, and cultivation of righteousness), it completely occupies the standpoint of actual life, which is realistic but not at all idealistic. It is fair to assume that a learned theologian, before he progressed to theology, came to a clear understanding not of the philosophical components of his field of study but rather of those preparatory exercises that are of a philosophical nature. The lower philosophical faculty may not presume to examine one of the higher faculties, and it is by no means a forced lack of diplomacy when a theologian, writing as such and in his own field, supplies a specimen of philosophy and (as can happen) exposes his own weak spots.

Someone who is a theologian can without a doubt also be a philosopher at the same time. But the theologian as such is simply not a philosopher, no more than the philosopher as such can be a theologian. Theology, for its part, commences precisely where the philosopher's activity ends, and it gets hold of man precisely where <415> the philosopher leaves him behind. Man is no more a philosopher than he is a theologian; the theologian discovers man and places himself next to him at the standpoint of life. The philosopher, at the transcendental standpoint, stands above life and gazes down on it and on every science concerned with it. For these reasons, then, the domains of the two sciences are forever separate.

The theologian's science commences precisely as the philosopher's deduction ends. The theologian, however, takes no notice of the philosopher's deduction, and that which is a *fact* for the theologian is what is *deduced* by the philosopher. If the two faculties do not agree on how to view some substantive matter, then the blame lies either with the philosopher for philosophizing incorrectly or with the theologian for attempting but failing to be a philosopher; or else the blame lies with both of them. If, for example, a *philosopher* says, "God is the moral world-order itself, and there is no God apart from this moral world-order, etc.," then he is not speaking in a manner that pertains to the theologian. The theologian thinks, "It makes no difference to me whether the philosopher is correct or incorrect. The members of that faculty may settle among themselves what God is or is not when He is understood in philosophical terms. To me, God is an omnipotent, omniscient, holy being, and whatever else He is called in every catechism." The theologian is correct, even according to the pronouncements of the philosopher, who because of his profession must be thoroughly acquainted with the theologian and must take note of him; the theologian is indeed correct in the content of his confession of faith. If the philosopher who begins in the way found above is simply allowed to speak freely and is not immediately forced from his lectern when he opens his mouth, he will undoubtedly conclude with the theologian's confession of faith; and, moreover, this confession will have acquired much in clarity and precision.

Suppose, however, that a *preacher* takes to the pulpit and says, “God, my devout brethren, is the moral world-order, and there is no God apart from this moral world-order. Moreover, the concept of being—a concept which philosophical discourse has grounds for restricting to mere material subsistence—is not to be applied, in the strict sense, to Him.” That, I say, a preacher could take to the pulpit with these words should matter to the theologian and to all the consistories; and the philosopher would be the first to sign the deposition decree, not on account of *atheism* but rather on account of the preacher’s *unfitness* for *his* office. The philosopher would be the first to advise him to return to a good university and study more thoroughly.

<416> “It is one thing to be a pastor; it is another thing to be a librarian.”³⁷ Let these words from Lessing, which a fellow contributor has already repeated in this journal, be repeated by me as well. I take the office of pastor to be a highly important one and fervently admire every member of this class who knows just what being a pastor requires and should require of him.

I hope that theologians will be content with this boundary settlement and that hereafter everyone will take care of his own house, where there will doubtless always be enough going on so that everyone will find something to do. So, for example, a thorough and mature theologian such as Dr. Gabler will certainly not approve of the nonsense that the authors in his field (especially the young ones who have heard many things but have learned nothing) propose to make current either through their philosophy (whenever they encounter a theologian who finds their historical understanding and their concepts of popular stewardship to be superficial) or through their historical understanding (whenever they encounter a philosopher who finds their philosophy to be superficial). This nonsense, I say, these people promote in a way that could not be more confusing and that must, in any case, turn out to be a great disadvantage—not to the study of philosophy, of course, but to the study of theology. Let us reject these mongrels and secure our own borders without bothering ourselves about foreign territory.

So it shall be, assuming that Mr. Gabler limits himself to running a purely theological journal. If, however, he proposes that his journal treat of the philosophy of religion as well (as it obviously does in the case of the proof from Mr. Vogel that is under examination), then without a doubt he subjects himself to the tribunal of philosophy. To tell him what we would think about his forbidding transcendental idealism access to his journal under this condition—i.e., the situation in which the goal of his journal had been reached, namely, that of establishing an exclusively

³⁷ Fichte is quoting Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781), the great *Aufklärer*, taken from *Eine Parabel, Nebst einer kleinen Bitte, und einem eventuellen Absagungsschreiben an den Herrn Pastor Goeze, in Hamburg* [*A Parable, Along with a Small Request and Possible Negative Response to Mr. Pastor Goeze in Hamburg*] (Braunschweig: 1778), p. 11. Lessing meant that he, as a librarian, had quite different obligations toward the public from Goeze, as a pastor. Regarding Fichte’s view of the differing duties of the scholar and the pastor, see SE, pp. 325–333 (GA, I, 5, pp. 300–307).

theological philosophy (a philosophy that his theology did not have to fear)—would be to repeat what has already been often said (but which has hardly been taken to heart and still has not been refuted anywhere), and such repetition grows tiresome in the long run. But we are of the opinion that even other theologians would scarcely appreciate such a faint-hearted measure.

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German–English Glossary

Abdruck	printing
Aberglaube	superstition
Abgötterei	idolatry
ableiten	to derive, to explain
Ableitung	derivation
Abneigung	antipathy
Absicht	intention, purpose
Allgemeingültigkeit	universal validity
Allmacht	omnipotence
Alleinphilosoph	one-sole-philosophy philosopher
Alleinwissenschaft	one-sole-science science
Anhänger	adherent
Anlage	predisposition
Annahme	assumption
annehmen	to assume
annihilieren	to annihilate
anschauen	to intuit
Anschauung	intuition
Ansicht	appearance, perspective, viewpoint
Antrieb	impulse
anzeigen	to indicate, to proclaim, to report
arg	evil
Articulation	articulation
aufösen	to analyze
Auflösung	dissolution
Aufseher	custodian
Ausführung	accomplishment, carrying out, realization
Ausfüllung	fulfillment
außerweltlich	extramundane
Äusserung	manifestation, statement
Ausspruch	dictum, pronouncement, verdict
Bedingung	condition, presupposition
Bedürftigkeit	neediness
Befleckung	blot
Befreiung	liberation
Befriedigung	satisfaction
Berufung	calling

Begebenheit	event
Begier	appetite, desire
Begierde	desire
Begreifen	comprehend, grasp
begreiflich	comprehensible
Begreiflichkeit	comprehensibility
Begriff	concept
Begriffkünstler	conceptual wizard
Behauptung	assertion, claim
Belohnung	reward
Beratung	deliberation
Beschaffenheit	constitution
Beschränkung	limitation
Beschuldigung	accusation
(sich) besinnen	to reflect
bestimmt	destined, determinate, determined
Bestimmtheit	determinacy, precision
Bestimmung	determination, vocation
Bestreben	aspiration, striving
betrachten	to contemplate
Betragen	conduct
beurteilen	to evaluate, to judge
Beurteilung	appraisal
Beurteilungskraft	power of judgment
Bewährung	confirmation
Beweis	proof
Beweisführung	argumentation
Beziehung	appeal, relation
bilden	to cultivate, to fashion
Bildung	cultivation, education
Böse	evil
Christentum	Christianity
Creatur	creation
Dasein	existence
deducieren	to deduce
Deduction	deduction
Democratismus	democratism
Denkart	mode of thought
Deutung	interpretation
Dienst	worship
Ding an sich	thing in itself
Dogmatismus	dogmatism

Ehre	honour
Ehrbarkeit	propriety
Erhalter	patron
Eifer	zeal
Eigenschaft	attribute, character
eigensinnig	capricious
Eigenwille	willfulness
eigenwillig	willful
Einbildungskraft	imagination
Einfall	idea, impression
Einrichtung	arrangement
Eitelkeit	vanity
Empfangen	reception
Empfindung	sensation, sentiment
endlich	finite
Endlichkeit	finitude
Endzweck	final goal
Entgegensetzung	opposition
Entschluß	decision
Entstehungsgrund	originating ground
Entweihung	desecration
Entwicklung	development
erblicken	to behold
Erfahrung	experience
Erfolg	outcome, result
Erfüllung	fulfillment
erhaben	sublime, exalted
Erhebung	elevation, exaltation
erkennen	to know
Erkenntnis	cognition, what can be known
Erklärung	explanation, explication
Erreichung	attainment, fulfillment
Erscheinung	appearance, illusion, spectacle
Erschleichung	devious maneuver
erweisen	to demonstrate
Eudämonismus	eudaemonism
Existenz	existence
Fach	discipline, field
Factum	fact
Fähigkeit	capacity
fassen	to grasp
Fassungskraft	power of comprehension

Feuereifer	zeal
Finsterniß	obscurity
fleischlich	sensuous
Folge	arrangement, consequence, result
Folgerung	consequence, inference
Fortdauer	continued existence
Fortgang	progression
Forschungstrieb	drive for knowledge
fortwährend	continually
Frevler	blasphemer
gebildet	cultured, educated
Gebot	command
Gefühl	feeling
Gegensatz	opposition
Gegenstand	matter, object, topic
Gegentheil	opposite
Gehorsam	obedience
Geist	mind, spirit
Geistesfreiheit	freedom of thought
Geisteskraft	mental ability
geistig	mental, spiritual
Gemüt	mind
Geneigtheit	propensity
Genesis	genesis
genetisch	genetic
Genuß	enjoyment, gratification, pleasure
Gerechtigkeit	justice
Geschöpf	creation
gesetzt	posited
Gesinnung	disposition, way of thinking
Gestalt	form
Gewicht	influence
Gewissen	conscience
Gewissensfreiheit	freedom of conscience
Gewißheit	certainty
Glaube	belief, faith
gleichartig	of the same kind
Glied	member
Glück	good fortune
Glückseligkeit	happiness
Gottähnlichkeit	godlikeness
Gottesläugner	atheist
Gottheit	deity, divinity

Gottseligkeit	godliness
göttlich	divine, godly
Gränze	border, boundary, limit
Greuel	outrage
Großmut	magnanimity
Grund	basis, foundation, ground, reason
Grund-Character	fundamental character
Grundlage	foundation
Gründlichkeit	profundity, thoroughness
Grundsatz	fundamental principle, principle
Grundstoff	basic element
Güte	goodness
Halbdenker	pseudo-intellectual
Handeln	acting, action
Handlung	act, action
Hang	propensity
Heft	number
Heil	salvation
Heiligkeit	holiness, sanctity
Heilsordnung	holy dispensation
herausgeben	to edit, to publish
Herr	master
Herrlichkeit	splendour
Herrschaft	dominance
Hirngespinnst	phantasm
Idealismus	idealism
infallibel	infallible
Infallibilität	infallibility
ins Unendliche	<i>in infinitum</i>
Intelligenz	intellect
irrgläubig	heterodox
Kenntniß	knowledge
Klügelei	quibbling
Klügeln	quibbling
Konsequenz	consistency
Körperwelt	material world
Kraft	force, power, strength
Kunst	art, artifice
künstlich	artificial, contrived, man-made
Kunstwerk	artifice

Lage	circumstance, condition, situation
Laster	vice
lästern	to revile
Laulichkeit	indifference
Laune	caprice
Lebenswandel	way of life
Legalität	legality
Lehramt	professorship
Lehre	doctrine
Lehrgebäude	edifice, systematic doctrine
Lüsternheit	lasciviousness
Mangel	weakness
Maßregel	measure
Mensch	human being, man, mankind, person
Merkmal	characteristic, sign
Moralismus	moralism
Moralität	morality
Motiv	motive
Mut	courage, spirit
Nachbild	copy
Nachdenken	reflection
nachmachen	to reproduce
Natureinrichtung	natural arrangement
Naturkraft	power of nature
Nichtwissen	non-knowing
Oberherrlichkeit	sovereign power
Obrigkeit	government
Offenbarung	revelation
Ordnung	order
Partei	faction, party
Pflicht	duty
pflichtmäßig	conformity with duty, dutiful
Phantasie	imagination
Platz	post
Politiker	policy maker
Position	positing
Produkt	product
Prüfung	examination, inquiry
Publikum	audience, public, public audience

Rang	position, status
Räsonnement	argument, reasoning
Rat	counsel
Realgrund	real-ground
Realität	reality
Rechtgläubigkeit	orthodoxy
Rechtschaffenheit	righteousness
Recht tun	right action
Regel	rule
Regelmäßigkeit	regularity
Regent	regent
Reihe	order
Religionswissenschaft	science of religion
Richterspruch	verdict
Richterstuhl	tribunal
Rohheit	coarseness
Sache	affair, business, case, cause, concern, matter, thing
sattsam	sufficiently
Satz	principle, proposition
Schein	appearance, illusion, pretence, semblance
Schicksal	destiny, fate
schlechthin	absolutely, just, simply
schließen	to infer
Schluß	conclusion, inference
Schrank	limit
Schuld	fault, guilt
Schuldigkeit	obligation
Schutz	patronage
schwachgläubig	weak in faith
Schwärmer	fanatic
schweben	to float, to hover, to soar
Segnung	blessing
Sehnen	yearning
seicht	shallow
Selbstbeobachtung	introspection
Selbstdenken	independent thought, reflection
selbstständig	self-sufficient
Selbständigkeit	self-sufficiency
selbsttätig	self-active
Selbsttätigkeit	self-activity
selig	beatific, blessed
Seligkeit	beatitude

Sein	being, existence
Sinn	meaning, sense, temperament
Sinneneindruck	sense impression
Sinnenwelt	sensible world
sinnlich	sensible, sensuous
Sinnlichkeit	sensibility
Sittengesetz	moral law
Sittenlehre	doctrine of morals
sittlich	ethical, moral
Sittlichkeit	morality
Sitz	seat
Souveränität	sovereignty
Spekulation	speculation
Staatsmann	official
Stimmung	disposition
Stoff	matter
Strafe	judgment
Streben	striving
Summe	sum-total
Tadel	rebuke
Tat	act, deed
trachten	to strive
Trieb	drive
Triebfeder	incentive
Truggebilde	illusion
Tugend	virtue
Tugendgefühl	moral feeling
Tun	activity
Übel	disorder
überirdisch	supernatural
übernatürlich	supernatural
übersinnlich	supersensible
Umänderung	transformation
unbegreiflich	incomprehensible
Unbegreiflichkeit	incomprehensibility
Unding	absurdity
Unendlichkeit	infinity
unerforschlich	unfathomable
Unfug	nonsense
Unglaube	unbelief
Unglück	bad fortune
unmaßgeblich	inconclusive

Unrichtigkeit	error
Unsittlichkeit	immorality
Unsträflichkeit	integrity
unvergänglich	everlasting
unversehrt	unscathed
unverständlich	unintelligible
Unverständlichkeit	unintelligibility
Unvermögen	incapacity
Unwissenheit	ignorance
unzertrennlich	indissoluble, inseparable
Urbild	archetype
Urheber	creator
Urquelle	primal source
Veränderung	alteration
Verantwortung	defense
Verbindlichkeit	obligation
Verbindung	combination, union
Verderben	depravity
verderblich	pernicious
Verdienst	merit
verdunkeln	to obscure
Vereinigung	union
Verfahren	activity, conduct
vergänglich	transitory
Vergeltung	retribution
vergleichen	to reconcile
Verhältniß	condition, footing, position, relationship
Verkehrtheit	perversity
vermittelt	established, mediated
Vermögen	capacity
vernehmen	to be aware of, to discern, to perceive
vernichten	to annihilate
Vernunft	reason
Vernunftgrund	rational ground
Vernunftwesen	rational being
vernunftwidrig	contrary to reason, irrational
versinnlicht	manifested to the senses, sensualized
Verstand	intellect, understanding
verständlich	intelligible
verunglimpfen	to defame
Vervollkommnung	improvement
Verwandlung	transformation
Vollbringung	performance

Vordersatz	premise
Vorsatz	purpose, resolution
Vorsehung	providence
Vorstellen	activity of representing, capacity for representation
Vorstellung	activity of representation, representation
Vorurteil	preconception
Wahrnehmung	perception
Wechselwirkung	reciprocity
Weltregent	world-sovereign
Weltregierung	world-governance
Welt-Seele	world-soul
Wesen	being, essence, nature
wesenlos	denatured
Widerschein	reflection
Wille	will
Willensbestimmung	determination of the will
Willkühr	caprice
Wirksamkeit	causal power, efficacy
Wissen	knowing, knowledge
Wollen	willing
Würde	dignity, worth
Zeitalter	age, time
Zergliederung	dissection
Zufluchtsort	refuge
Zügellosigkeit	licentiousness
Zusage	promise
Zusammenhang	connection, context, interconnection
Zusatz	addendum
Zustand	condition, lot, order, situation
Zutrauen	trust
Zuversicht	confidence
Zweck	end, goal, purpose
Zweckbegriff	concept of a goal
Zweckmäßigkeit	purposiveness
zweckwidrig	counterproductive

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